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Two Fair Women ; OR, UNDER THE SURFACE.

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CHAPTER I.

AN OLD-TIME LINK.

It was a bleak, threatening night in the latter part of August, 18—. No moon was visible in the murky sky, and the paling stars had long since been obscured behind the scudding racks of angry cloud-banks racing low through the air. A moaning wind sighed ominously and dismally among the scattered trees, looking like specters in the night. Anon

vivid flashes of lightning illumined the inky sky above, leaving the darkness ten times more impenetrable than before, while the hoarse thunder growled under the bending sky.

The man who was walking along that almost obscured path to the rear of the little town of Gloucester, across the Delaware, on this dark and inauspicious night, paused. He leaned against a tree as if he was tired, and peered closely around him. At that instant, a blinding glare of lightning glittered through the dark woods; in a moment as the fearful collapse again occurred, a tree not ten yards away was splintered from top to bottom.

Quick, fleeting and brief as had been the sulphurous glimmer, it was sufficient to reveal the repulsive lineaments of the man's face; and that face, though terrible to look upon, was youthful.

The fellow started back.

"By Jove! that's close cutting!" he ejaculated with an oath. "But I'm not afraid. Lightning never strikes twice in the same place. I am safe enough here. I am on business—business that concerns me deeply, or my name is not— Ha! another? Well, fire away; I am not afraid of you," he muttered, as another terrible flash glared over the woods, and a thunderbolt crashed above him.

But, though the man spoke vauntingly, he was evidently frightened, for he hastily drew from his pocket a small flask and drank greedily from it.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed. "This gives me strength and nerve! I must not, will not flinch! If all goes well I need not longer fear the wolf at my door. Yet, what care I for the wolf? I will not work, for I am lazy and— Now, now for real work."



NEITHER SAW A TALL, DARK FIGURE STANDING NOT TWENTY FEET AWAY, ENVELOPED IN THE HEAVY SHADOWS OF THE PASSAGE.

He abruptly ceased his mutterings and crouched closer to the tree, as in a lull of the wind, hasty footsteps were heard approaching.

On came the steps. Then, at last, a dim figure showed indistinctly in the wood beyond; then it was abreast him who skulked near the path. Like a tiger the man bounded upon him who came, and his heavy hand was upon his throat.

A fierce struggle ensued. The man who was so suddenly and so unexpectedly assailed, was brave and strong, and he gradually gained the advantage in the contest. But then a knife flashed in the lightning's glare; and again and again.

The struggle was ended. The man, without a groan, fell heavily to the ground. In an instant greedy hands were rifling his pockets. The well-filled wallet was found. With a cry of triumph the red-handed murderer shoved it into his bosom, and sprung to his feet. But, with a cry of alarm, he started back and brandished his gory blade again, as a tall figure towered over him, pistol in hand.

"Hold, man!" hissed the new-comer. "I know you; and I know what you have done. Advance at your peril!"

"You here! you! Oh! heaven, I am undone!" moaned the wretch.

"Throw down your knife, fellow; we'll come to terms. There! so. Now give me half the prog, and I'm mum."

"Swear it, then!"

"I swear."

"Agreed; we'll divide."

The next morning when the sun rose bright and clear, a bloody corpse was found in the little copse back of Gloucester.

Who did the deed?

This tragic occurrence took place six years prior to the opening of our story.

CHAPTER II.

THE WOMAN AND THE MAN.

A PEERLESS beauty!

Tall, elegantly formed, rounded, a sufficient *embonpoint*, a clear, almost alabaster skin, through which the coursing veins and arteries showed plainly—a broad, white forehead, back from which fell in heavy, disheveled masses, a very torrent of jet-black, glossy hair, far down over the half-bare, marble-like shoulders—a full, expressive face, not altogether intellectual, yet sufficiently so; a proud, curved mouth; arching brows of midnight hue; lashes, long and silken in texture, almost concealing the dreamy black eyes!

Such was Minerva Clayton, the bank-president's daughter.

And there she stood, leaning her dimpled elbow upon the marble-topped bureau, gazing out listlessly, musingly over Rittenhouse Square, at the fast-falling snow which filled the air with its feathery battalions, and whitened the streets, and the sighing, moaning, bare-armed trees.

Long and abstractedly did the young girl—not twenty—look through the half-drawn curtain. And she looked until her gaze became meaningless—stony.

At last, with a sudden start and a half-cold shiver, she aroused herself, and drew a cushioned chair to the register, through which was pouring into the room volumes of grateful heat.

Minerva Clayton was clad in an easy afternoon *neglige*. It was evident that she had just about begun dressing for the evening, as articles—costly too—of female apparel, were lying in disordered heaps upon the bed and about the room.

"Heigho!" she murmured. "I really forgot myself; and I must not catch cold or papa would go crazy at once."

She threw a light shawl over her shoulders as she spoke, and casting her eyes aloft leaned back in the comfortable chair. She was soon again lost in thought.

Minerva Clayton was a magnificent girl, but her eyes were not altogether dreamy and inno-

cent when the long lashes uncovered them, and permitted an unobstructed view into the dark depths. And when she had withdrawn from the window, which the wind was so ominously rattling, she had opened her eyes, wide! But she was very pretty, very fascinating—everything to ensnare a man's heart, and to madden impulsive youth.

"No!" she muttered, still communing with herself—endeavoring, it seemed, to settle some vexatious point to her satisfaction. "What care I for Alice Ray? What care I for her soft baby face, with its mild blue eyes? *She* has no hold upon Clinton Craig's heart, this poor fool! she loves him. Methinks I am fair to look upon—and my eyes are black! Clinton can not care for her! Baby in face—almost the same in person—and, I am proud and stately—so they say! *They* say! Ay! my admirers say so, and, 'pon my soul, my admirers I cannot count! Besides," and her lips curled in scorn, "I am far richer than Alice Ray; papa is a bank-president; and that is so respectable. Old Richard Ray is a lumber dealer—a small one, at that, and that is next to nothing. But," and her voice sunk to an anxious whisper, "did I not trifle too much with Clinton last evening?"

She moved restlessly in her chair, and, for a moment, her broad, marble-like brow was wrinkled into an uneasy frown. But her face was smooth and unruffled again, as she laughed merrily and continued:

"I dare say I did tease him a little. He seemed somewhat vexed, and entirely in earnest when he declared that if I did not accompany him to the opening ball of the Academy of Music to-night, he would take Alice Ray! What if he did so?"

She glanced hastily at a miniature clock of Black Forest wood suspended over the marble mantle.

"'Tis getting late, and I must stop this!" she almost hissed, her voice instantly growing harsh, while a hard look passed over her features. "Obstinate boy! he'll be as good as his word. I know him well; and he should have known that I was but joking. He shall not take Alice Ray—there! And—But what claim have I on Clinton Craig? He has never proposed, but he shall! For he loves me, and I know it."

She locked her ivory-like fingers together, and sat for a moment as though wrapt in profound meditation. And as she mused, a singular, doubting expression spread over her pretty face.

"Would I love Clinton Craig were he not heir—everybody says so, even his adopted father—to what might be termed a colossal fortune?" she at last muttered between her locked teeth. "True enough, I am very rich; papa has only me to whom to give his hundred thousand; yet for all that, I could not marry a poor man; it would be a disgrace. But, besides his expected money, Clinton Craig is so intelligent, so handsome, so elegant, so everything! that I can't help loving him *some*! I forgot something—"

Her voice sunk so low that her mutterings were inaudible. But she sat upright in her chair and exclaimed aloud:

"I forgot that Algernon Floyd, too, is ambitious—that he is elegant and handsome. I do not err when I say I am sure he loves me as much as does Clinton Craig. But," and a hiss again sounded in her tones, "he has no money!"

For ten minutes Minerva Clayton sat silent—almost motionless—and gazed vacantly ahead of her. But, at last, awaking herself, she glanced around her and said, hurriedly:

"Time flies. I must act. I must write Clinton a line or so; then we will see if he takes Alice Ray to the ball."

As she spoke she drew a small writing-table near her. In a few moments she had dashed off a hasty note, inclosed it in a scented envelope and directed it.

The superscription was:

"CLINTON CRAIG, Esq.,
"No. 10 SPRUCE ST.,
"(Present.)"

Striking a small hand bell lying near her, the proud girl again leaned back in her chair. This time the perturbed shade had gone from her brow and she smiled sweetly.

"That is polite!" she said, softly. "'Tis not too forward; and—Clinton Craig shall not take Alice Ray to the Academy to-night! He'll come! I do not fear me."

Just then the door opened.

"Here, Annie, take this note, and tell Henry to carry it at once—to its address. He can read."

The domestic took the note, bowed and left the room.

Clinton Craig strode up and down his richly carpeted room. He seemed anxious and excited.

"I tell you what, Fred," he said, pausing and turning toward his friend who sat there watching him quietly. "I don't like the position I am in!"

"I don't blame you."

"You don't? Yes; I suppose not."

"Don't you get vexed, Clint," said the other, laughing, "but take my advice—and I am able to give it; get out of that position—honestly, of course, my good fellow."

"Easy enough to talk, Fred; but put yourself in my place for a while, and—"

"Not much!—thank you!"

"But just suppose that you do, Fred?"

"Very good; I would do exactly what I advise you to do. The fact is, Clint, you can't do otherwise."

"Confound it, I say emphatically!" exclaimed young Craig, impulsively. "I know, Fred, that Minerva was but joking, toying with me, when she said she would not go with me to the ball to-night."

"Granted, and I believe it; for the girl really loves you—or your expected millionaire—"

"Nonsense, Fred."

"Exactly so—all save the nonsense; and it may be that time—However, that's neither here nor there. Minerva Clayton, after promising you a month since to go with you to this confounded ball, now suddenly, and with no reason given, declines to go. Half-vexed, you rush off and ask pretty Alice Ray to go with you. She has consented. And now you want to break your engagement with her, without any other reason than that you are madly in love with Minerva Clayton; perhaps, too, because the banker's daughter would look better on your arm, and create more noise and flutter at the ball than poor blue-eyed Alice could. But, my friend, we differ."

"You are candid, Fred."

"I am more, Clinton; I am your friend. I must speak the truth."

There was a pause for a few moments; but Clinton Craig, who was again striding anxiously up and down the room, could not be silent for any length of time.

"I do love Minerva Clayton; nay, I worship her, I adore—"

"There, Clint—stop; you are getting red in the face, and—I'll have to bleed you!"

Fred Ashe, the young doctor smiled, as he spoke.

"Well, then," returned the other, good-naturedly, at the same time taking a seat, "in a few words: I love Minerva and would not offend her."

"How can you offend her?"

"By taking Alice Ray to the ball."

"You should have thought of that before. Besides, if Minerva Clayton will not go with you, herself, why it is simply tyranny in her to force you to remain away. You are not engaged."

"I wish we were!"

"I don't know about that. Perhaps—ay! perhaps"—and Frederick Ashe, M. D., looked a little serious as he abruptly ended his somewhat singular sentence.

Clinton Craig paid no attention to this; Minerva Clayton, her probable wrath, its future

consequences, were filling his mind just now.

"The fact is," continued young Ashe, as if his own mind was made up, "you have gotten yourself into this mess, and you must get yourself out of it. Put on your best countenance, and make little Alice Ray happy, by escorting her to the ball. Beyond a doubt, *she* loves you, Clinton."

"I must do it, I suppose," muttered the other, slowly. "Yet I love not Alice, though I esteem her."

"Is it because she is not so rich as Minerva Clayton, my friend?" and the doctor looked straight and steadily into the face of his companion.

But Clinton Craig did not hesitate; nor did his face flush at all as he promptly answered:

"Not a bit of it, Fred. You are inclined to hold me cheap. I have money enough—a large fortune, certainly *in prospectu*. But I do not love Alice Ray, and could not, were I to try ever so much."

"Ah! Well, it would not require much effort on my part," murmured the young physician, softly.

"You—you love Alice Ray!" exclaimed young Craig, in surprise. "You amaze me; but, 'pon my soul, Fred, I am glad to hear it. I'll assist you. Alice will make you a good wife. You go with her to the ball."

"You jump readily at conclusions, Clint," answered the other, dryly. "I love Alice Ray already; but it is for her pure, noble heart, her amiable disposition, her lofty soul. But I dare not hope to make her my wife. She is too good for me, and—Why, under the circumstances, I'll not go with her to the ball."

"You will not? Then you—"

At that moment the bell rung. Then a note was handed in.

Clinton took it. As his eyes fell on the superscription, he reddened to the roots of his hair. Then a radiant smile broke over his handsome face. He hastily tore open the envelope and read the sheet it contained.

"I told you so!" he exclaimed, joyfully. "Minerva—Heaven bless her!—is true! Listen, Fred:

"MON CHER AMI:—I was but joking last night, and acted as I did simply to *try you*. Please take me to the ball, and—not little white-faced Alice Ray."

"Come, and bring the answer yourself. Ever thine, MINERVA."

A moment of silence. It was broken by young Craig.

"Now, Fred, what do you think of that? Isn't she a glorious girl?"

"I can't exactly see any glory attaching to Miss Clayton," said the doctor, sarcastically. "I can only see in her a deep, designing woman."

The last words were spoken seriously, and firmly.

Clinton's brow contracted, as a hot, angry crimsoning flashed over it; but the young man controlled himself.

"I am your friend, Fred, and you are free with me," he said.

"Because you are my friend, I am free with you," was the quiet reply. "And now, Clinton, what are your plans? What are you going to do?"

"Going to do? Can you ask? Why, the answer is plain; I am going with Minerva."

"And Alice, Clinton?"

"Why, confound it, I do say! Now, Fred, that's a good fellow, you see the predicament I am in."

"No, I don't."

"You do! And now, that's a good fellow, you must relieve me in this matter; you must take a note from me, and be Alice's escort yourself." And he took his friend's hand coaxingly in his.

Dr. Ashe pondered; but it was only for a moment.

"I'll accommodate you, my friend," he said, earnestly, "because your honor is at stake. But, as I am no postman, I will take no note. I will tell Alice in person, why you failed to keep your engagement, and—why, I'll be off."

Clinton Craig was happy now; he did not persuade his friend to remain longer.

That night at nine o'clock, the young heir to the fortune—as aforesaid—attired in the tip of fashion, descended from a glittering carriage before the entrance of an aristocratic mansion on Walnut street, opposite Rittenhouse Square. Bounding up the stately steps, he rung the bell.

And that evening when Dr. Ashe stood in the humble, yet comfortable house of Alice Ray on Vine street, near Sixth, and told his message and his errand, a great welling tear suffused the girl's eye for a moment. But she dashed it aside as she murmured:

"Very good, doctor. I could not expect him to go under such circumstances. But I will go with you; and I thank you sincerely for your kindly offer of protection."

CHAPTER III.

THE NIGHT PROWLERS.

THE shades of night had just hurtled down; the blinding snow was still falling, and the cold north-west wind blew raw and wintry over the Quaker city.

A rough night to be abroad, and yet there were those who walked that wild wintry evening, despite the crusty snow under foot, and the cutting blasts that moaned and roared through the almost deserted streets.

It was about nine o'clock; in fact, the sonorous bell in the lofty, wind-blown cupola of Independence Hall had just struck that hour.

Stealing along under the dense shade of the reservoir hill at Fairmount, two men took their way silently yet swiftly on. They hurried past the mill-houses, then across the little bridge, and turning to the left bent their steps through the crunching snow toward the old-time Lemon Hill. The night-prowlers paused not for a moment, but, despite the darkness, pursued their way boldly in the teeth of the blustering wind which swept from behind the wooded hill before them. It was evident that the ground was as familiar to them by night as by day. Crossing the second bridge which spanned a little estuary of the Schuylkill, they turned into the summer road leading around the base of the hill and skirting the river by the boat-houses.

Still the heavy flakes of snow came hurtling down in flying, scurrying eddies and gusts; and the hoarse wind sung wrathfully, dolefully through the trees, and over the dark bosom of the shuddering river.

And as yet the men had not spoken a word. With their slouched hats drawn over their brows, their heavy overcoats pulled high up around their necks, they bowed their heads in the face of the driving storm and strode hastily on.

At last, the taller of the two suddenly paused as Girard avenue bridge was reached, which structure reared itself high and spectral, and stretching away into obscurity in the gray gloom.

"By Jove! I am tired," he muttered. "We'll rest. True enough, I have lungs of leather, but they must be steel-fastened to stand up long under such work! Come! crouch up close. I tell you this wind will find its way through pilot cloth, were it a foot thick!"

He shivered as he spoke.

His companion drew closer to his side, and sheltered himself behind the massive buttress of the bridge.

"You are right, Algy," he said, half-familiarly, half-respectfully. "'Tis a raw night; and with such a wind as that against you—whew! listen to it—to say nothing of a foot of half-frozen snow under your boots, makes it a hard matter to get along."

"Well, we'll rest a minute, and then push on. I must begin to arrange matters to-night, some way or another, that's certain! Confound my luck! I am in need of money, I am—and so are you. We know one another; we must work together to get that money."

"That uncle of yours is a mean, stingy old chap, Algy. You are his own flesh and blood, while that other fellow is only—"

"A miserable nothing! an interloper—a man

who stands between me and daylight, between me and money, ay! between me and life itself!" interrupted the other, fiercely. "Yes; and who knows anything of him?"

"Why, it seems that your old uncle does," answered his companion, quietly. "I've heard it said, that though the fellow may be fatherless and motherless, yet your uncle may be—mind you I say *may* be—some kin to him."

"Nonsense, Jem! And yet—No, he is no way related to him. This old uncle of mine is obstinate, though people call him benevolent, philanthropic, and all that sort of thing. He took a fancy to this fellow—a fancy, dandy-looking chap now; and I am convinced that he intends giving him the bulk of his property. Yes, he'll do that, and—*starve* me!"

"The old man *will* have his way, Algy—if he ain't prevented."

The latter words were spoken in a low, significant tone.

"You are right, Jem; you are right! But will he have his way? Will this yellow-haired, pearly-faced upstart cheat me of what should be justly mine? Hark you, Jem; I am working for money; I'll win it. But come; we are rested now; we must hurry on. When we are safely housed, and sitting by a genial fire with a pitcher of ale between us—alas! that I can afford nothing better—why we can talk more at leisure. Yet I forgot something: is Moll expecting us?"

"Yes; I told her this afternoon to entertain no company, but to keep the little parlor for us."

"What did she say?"

"That she would do so, *provided* there was prog in it, and that she received five dollars for keeping closed doors. The old hag swore that she expected a party at her snug old house for 'catfish and coffee—'"

"Yes; and you paid her, Jem?"

"I did—knowing *you* would promptly square with me," answered the fellow, with a half-audible chuckle.

The tall man did not reply, and the fellow called Jem continued:

"However, Algy, I can *trust* you."

"Very good; and—you *had* better."

These words had in them a peculiar significance. At all events, Jem was suddenly silent.

"Now, let's be off, Jem; you know I must be back in time for the ball. I've a ticket—given me—and I will see *her*—Minerva Clayton, the grand, and the beautiful!—there. The proud girl scorns me; but she shall yet love me. Come."

The men turned at once and continued their way along the river. At last a dark object reared itself before them. The prowlers paused; and the tall man placing his fingers to his lips gave forth a sudden, shrill call.

Almost instantly a light flashed out from the dark object ahead. But, in a moment, it was gone.

A minute later the two men disappeared in the swart shadow flung by a small house that stood almost on the very edge of the river.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BATTLE AND THE VICTORY.

No one, living at the time, will ever forget a celebrated great occasion in Philadelphia, happening in the winter of the year 185—. That was *the* event of the year, and this great occasion was the formal opening of the Academy of Music, at which time a grand and ever-to-be-remembered ball was given. The doings and incidents of that ball, are to this day as vividly recalled by some, as though they transpired last night.

It was a raw, wintry night—the same one, on the afternoon preceding it, we have seen Minerva Clayton gazing musingly out of her window, over Rittenhouse Square—the same night on which we have noted two prowlers skulking their stealthy way under the howling, bare-armed trees at Fairmount.

But, though the night was rough and wild; though the winds trooped hoarsely along in invisible battalions, it was a gay, rollicksome, joyous night—to some.

There are fabulous tales extant—now almost grown into legends—of that blustering night; tales rivaling those of the mythical Sindbad, in richness, gorgeousness and splendor, of the show, magnificence and glitter at the Academy; tales of diamond necklaces, spunglass dresses and royal silks, satins and broadcloth. The author well remembers the event with its many marvels; he knows that there is more truth than fiction in the grand tales which have been handed down.

But it is not our purpose to describe the ball at the Academy; our promise is to write out page by page, a very mysterious heart-history, a very veracious love story, and to unravel it quietly, link by link, as we proceed.

Clinton Craig of whom everybody knew so much, and—so little, whose name, on account of his princely good luck, was on everybody's lips, whose splendid form and handsome face were known from the Neck to the Rising Sun, from the Delaware to the Schuylkill—was a striking man in personal appearance.

He was about the medium stature, not grossly stout, but elegantly proportioned, with fine, erect, spreading shoulders, a deep chest, a slender waist, and a foot like a soldier of ten years' service. He was a decided blonde, with a fair skin—womanly, indeed—large blue eyes, delicate tracing of eyebrows, a profusion of curling chestnut hair, clustering rather disorderedly over a forehead remarkable for its great breadth rather than for height—remarkable, too, for its almost marble-like whiteness. His face was full, though of a wonderfully vivacious and intellectual cast. But it was his square jaw, his prominent chin, along with the nervous clutching of his muscular hands, which showed the iron nature, at bottom, of the man. He was not over twenty-four years old.

On this night of nights, as he entered the immense auditorium of the Academy of Music, with Minerva Clayton, the bank-president's daughter, hanging on his arm, and paused for a moment under the brilliant light of the chandelier, to gaze around at the scene of almost incredible splendor, he looked grandly handsome.

His cheeks were aglow with excitement, and his flashing eyes showed the exultation swelling within him, as he felt the weight of the lovely girl who clung to him and gave him *eclat* and glory by her own splendor and magnificence.

We use the term *lovely* in speaking of Minerva Clayton as she stood there and glanced about her half-timidly, half-boldly, simply because we can use no stronger; a faint idea only of the girl's wondrous beauty can be conveyed by that little word.

She was clad in the richness and extravagance that unstinted wealth could afford, and which this grand event demanded from one of her station. Her dress was of the costliest material; it could be worn only once, or on an occasion similar to this. Her raven hair was gathered away from her fine brow in heavy masses—those masses laden with glittering jewels—falling even down to her waist. Diamonds, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, fairly blazed forth from every conceivable portion of her person. In her worldly grandeur she looked like some modern queen of Sheba.

"Magnificent, Minerva—Miss Clayton—magnificent!" exclaimed the young man with enthusiasm.

"Yes, grand indeed; and we, as Philadelphians, should be proud of this event. But, Mr. Craig, you can—"

She hesitated and cast her eyes down.

Young Craig glanced tenderly at her.

"What—what can I—Miss Clayton?" he asked softly, still bending his ardent gaze upon her.

"Why—yes!—you can, if you wish, call me *Minerva*," she returned in a voice that was scarcely audible.

"Heaven bless you, Minerva! You know not how happy you have—"

"There, there, Clinton—for such I will call you—stop! You may be overheard," hastily interrupted the girl as a tall, stately-looking

young man, clad in elegant attire, suddenly strode by them.

This individual paused for a moment and turning toward the flashing couple, bowed low. Then as a dusky flush swept over his face, he reared his form and hurried on into the mazy throng.

That man was about thirty years of age; and despite the ominous, forbidding frown which rested on his dark, heavily-bearded face, he was a fine looking fellow. As he moved gracefully and familiarly through the swaying crowd, it was easy to see that he was perfectly at home—that, if anything, he felt himself superior to the situation. But in another moment he had bowed low before a princely woman, and was lost speedily to view, as he bore her away on his arm with the grace of a courtier.

"Algernon Floyd! *he* here!" exclaimed young Craig unguardedly, while his brow contracted just a little, and a bitter, vindictive fire gleamed for an instant in his eyes.

"And why not, Clinton?" asked the banker's daughter in a low, but distinct voice, at the same time watching, furtively, the young man's face.

Clinton Craig winced under that remark; for the moment, he had forgotten that that dark-bearded young man was own blood nephew to the rich merchant who, for some or other cause, had adopted *him* and made *him* heir presumptive to a colossal fortune. He had forgotten that Algernon Floyd had more legal right to that fortune than he had, and that many wise ones had said as much right out, and endeavored, at least, to make old Thompson Floyd divide equally his property between his nephew and his adopted son.

But Minerva Clayton still kept her eyes fastened on the young man's face. She had asked a pointed question and was waiting for an answer.

"Yes, truly," answered Clinton with some embarrassment of manner. "Algernon Floyd has as much right to come here as any one, Minerva. But,—why the truth is, I did not think he was able, pecuniarily, to afford to attend the ball. You know, Minerva, tickets are ten dollars each, and—"

"Exactly—where did he get the money—eh, Clinton?"

"You are right, Minerva; you are good at guessing; but come; we are rested now. Let us go upon the platform; I see that they are forming for the dance. We must hurry or we'll be too late. Now—good heavens! here comes Fred Ashe with—"

"*Little Alice Ray* on his arm!" interrupted Minerva, contemptuously, as she glanced superciliously at the advancing couple. "I don't like her, Clinton; and I can't bear that meddlesome, self-opinionated, rude doctor!"

Before young Craig could reply to this, and ere he could turn away—as he endeavored to do—Fred Ashe, with his lovely charge clinging close to him, stood before them.

The young physician bowed respectfully, yet curtly to Minerva, scarcely noticing his friend Clinton, and hurried on.

But Alice Ray, with her auburn hair, and soft blue eyes, smiled good-naturedly on her old beau as she passed, and whispered to him guilelessly and innocently:

"I received your message, Clinton, and—yes—I was satisfied. It was all right. I hope you'll enjoy the ball."

Then she was gone.

Clinton Craig bit viciously at the ends of his sweeping mustache; but he contrived to mumble some incoherent words, and make an awkward bow of acknowledgment to the fair girl who had spoken so sweetly, so confidently to him.

But Minerva Clayton's brow was clouded with an angry scowl.

"Does that girl—does Alice Ray call you Clinton?" she asked, in a hoarse whisper, as her eyes glared upon the young man.

"Not with my consent, Minerva," was the prompt reply; for he felt the warm, rounded arm tremble in his. "Fear not!" he hastened

to say: "love for Alice Ray has no place in my heart. But we must go now."

Taking her hand in his, he half-drew her through the crowd to the large platform covering the entire parquette, and which had been laid for dancing.

Then, at a given signal, the orchestra pealed forth its entrancing strains, and in an instant the floors were creaking under the measured tread of twenty sets. And again and again were those sets formed, and the wild, giddy, dance went on. And every time Clinton Craig was Minerva's partner.

At length there came a lull; the weary dancers promenaded the platform, flushed and breathless.

As young Craig stood under a gaslight chatting gayly with the banker's daughter, the two were suddenly approached by Algernon Floyd. His dark face was pleasant with a winning, half-appealing smile as he bent his head low before Minerva; he did not even glance once at her companion.

"I hope," he began, in a deep, but sweet and musical voice, "that I can dare ask Miss Clayton to honor *me* with her hand in the next set?"

He gazed fixedly at her as he made his emphasis.

"Miss Clayton is engaged for the evening," said Craig, stiffly, before the girl could reply.

"No, no, Clin—Mr. Craig; I am not," said Minerva, hastily and spitefully. "I *will* dance with you, Mr. Floyd."

As she spoke, she quietly slipped her hand from young Craig's arm, and transferred it to that of the dark-faced man who towered before her.

A smile of undisguised triumph flitted for a moment over Algernon Floyd's features as he drew that round, rosy arm in his. Turning off, he bowed and said, sarcastically, to Clinton Craig:

"With your permission, sir."

In a moment more, with Minerva by his side, and Dr. Ashe with Alice Ray as *vis-a-vis*, Algernon Floyd glided away gracefully in the dance.

No one knew of the battle that had been fought that night in the bosom of the dark-bearded fellow; but, that he, poor—penniless, almost—and without expectations, had won a victory, none knew better than did Clinton Craig, the petted.

CHAPTER V.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

THE hours wore on and still the ball was kept up.

It was long after twelve o'clock when Dr. Ashe and Alice Ray left the platform over the parquette, and elbowing their way through the crowd toward the stage, finally reached that mythical sacred region, known as "behind the scenes."

Slides, swings, curtains, sets, ropes, pulleys, and all the rough paraphernalia of scene-shifting was there. The place was a labyrinth in itself; and its dusky, dreary solitudes were but imperfectly lighted by a stray gas-jet here and there.

But Alice, leaning on the young physician's arm, walked confidently on.

Fred Ashe seemed suddenly serious—thinking, and slightly excited; but he was in nowise nervous.

At length they reached a side exit, and turning to the left, walked on a little way and seated themselves on a bench that chanced to be there. A single burner illuminated the quiet, secluded precincts. The cold north wind forced its way into the rear of the building, and blew raw and chilly along the passageway, rattling the cordage, and shaking the skeleton arras and tapestry into many a mournful creak.

Alice drew her opera cloak about her shoulders, and crouched confidently and trustingly closer to her protector. The light from the single jet shone down full upon them, as they

sat there all alone in that dreary portion of the large structure. It lit up the face and figure of both.

Alice Ray was a lovely girl—petite in form, yet sufficiently rounded and plump, her bared arms showing to a certain extent beneath the folds of the cloak which she had drawn over her shoulders. Her rich auburn hair rippled in the reflection of the light like wavelets of gold. The girl's face was that of an angel, so pure, so innocent, so artless, so heavenly fascinating and lovely. The gentle, softly curving mouth, the half-pale, half-rosy lips, slightly parted, showing the glistening, pearly teeth within; the large blue eyes, dove-like and winning in their tender glance; the broad, white forehead with the arching brows—all made a very pretty and pleasing picture to look upon, one to be hung up in the halls of memory, there to be loved and cherished.

Fred Ashe was not, strictly, what might be termed a handsome man. In size he was neither large nor small; but his figure was perfect—well-knit, muscular and erect. His face was dark and swarthy and almost concealed behind a full curling beard of a dark brown color. His hair was of the same hue, and was cut close to his head. But if the young doctor was not handsome, he certainly was not homely; for there was a tenderness about his rather sad face, a quiet, sympathizing look in his large black eyes, that won upon all. Along with this, there was a general independent expression of feature that gave him a very noble appearance.

"Are you cold, Miss Ray?" he asked, with some solicitude, as he saw her tighten her cloak around her.

"No—not too cold, doctor," she replied, cheerfully; "for I prefer almost anything to the stifled air in yonder crowded ball. I am glad we can get pure air, even if cold, here, doctor."

"Then you are not overfond of such scenes, such occasions as this?" asked the physician, quickly.

"No, indeed—once in a long while will do for me," was the quiet, earnest reply. "The truth is, I care but little for company; that is," she hastened to say, "such company as we see here to-night. There is so much thoughtlessness, so much giddiness and triviality, that I soon tire of it. Ah! yes," with a weary sigh, "on such times as this, I am inclined to think all men, and women, too, treacherous and insincere."

Fred Ashe pondered ere he answered; but as the words just spoken fell on his ear, a bright flush of pleasure, of downright joy, passed over his sober face.

"You are right, Miss Ray," he said, at length; "and yet you are not altogether right. This I readily grant, that many men are insincere, yet I cannot admit that *all* are so. Moreover, I have more faith in women—in certain ones."

He looked at her straight in the face; his gaze was ardent and significant.

But Alice Ray did not change color under that steady look. She returned his gaze frankly as she replied:

"Yes, I was wrong, doctor; there are two men in this world, besides my dear father, whom I could unhesitatingly trust," and she still gazed innocently in the young man's face.

"And those two, Miss Ray?" asked the physician, almost in a whisper, as he leaned toward her.

"Clinton Craig and—"

She hesitated and bent her head.

"Yes, Clinton Craig; and the other?" persisted the young man, as he started and frowned slightly.

"And Doctor Fred Ashe," was the half-hesitating reply,

A shade flashed over the young physician's face, as, for a moment, he bowed his head and mused. But with that shade, there was an expression of something bright, as of a fitting hope, a mad, yearning ambition, a half-triumph.

"And so you would trust my friend, Mr. Craig, Miss Ray?" he asked, slowly.

"With my very life!" was the prompt, impulsive reply.

Fred Ashe started, and his brow wrinkled into an ominous frown. But he said:

"Clinton Craig is well worthy your trust; yet—yet—there are times when—"

"When what, doctor?" asked the fair-faced maiden, somewhat anxiously.

"Perhaps—nothing, Miss Ray; but—"

"But, again! What is it, doctor? Do tell me!" and she gazed at him unflinchingly, though there was an anxious expression upon her face.

"Well, Clinton Craig is a trusty, noble-hearted man, one who would scorn to stoop to a low action, and—why Minerva Clayton is a very beautiful and fascinating woman," was the strange reply.

For a moment a shiver shook Alice Ray's slender form, and a flitting look of pain rested upon her features. But looking up again, she said, calmly:

"Granted, doctor; but that latter fact does not affect Mr. Craig and his uprightness, his nobleness of nature."

"True; it does not. But I do not like that woman, Miss Ray—I have no fancy for Minerva Clayton."

The young man spoke earnestly.

"Nor do I!" was the sudden and somewhat vehement reply. "Yet," she continued, as if she was ashamed of her hastiness and self-committal, "I have, after all, no reason for my—my dislike; the young lady has never harmed me."

"Nor me; yet elegant and dazzling as she is, she is a dangerous girl—ay! she is, as I know, *deep and designing*."

"Designing? How, and in what way, doctor?" asked Alice, quickly.

But Doctor Ashe did not answer at once. His face flushed viciously, and he turned his head away.

Alice Ray, trembling and excited, continued to gaze at him.

"Perhaps I have spoken too freely, Miss Ray," said the young man, as his eyes once more sought hers. "I only meant—"

"Too freely, doctor? and with me?" and the maiden bit her red lip vexatiously. "Certainly you can trust me?"

"I do trust you, Miss Ray, else I had not spoken as I did; I only feared that I might have wronged the young lady. But, Miss Ray," and he hesitated, "can I trespass on your time and patience just a minute longer? The place is fitting, the opportunity good, for what I have to say, provided you will listen," and he looked at her earnestly, with his large black eyes, "must not be heard by others."

Alice Ray was a very pure, innocent maiden—unsuspecting and as trusting as a girl of ten years; but she was a woman and could easily read men, when the subject that burdened their minds pertained to heart-matters. Her pale face flushed slightly at first, then beautifully crimson, as her eyes gazed into the dark, pleading orbs of the man who sat beside her. The maiden read the secret there, and, for a single moment, an expression of joy rushed luminously over that innocent, baby face. But in an instant it was gone, and one of pain—almost of anguish, took its place. She simply bowed her pretty head and whispered, in a sweet voice:

"Speak on, doctor; I am listening. Speak on; perhaps it were as well. I'll heed what you say, and I will, sacredly, preserve your secret."

What did she mean?

Dr. Ashe was a man of iron nerve, as had already—and more than once—been proved, in his young life, and as will be shown further in this eventful history; but he trembled now before that sweet-faced girl, before that mutely bowed head, with its mass of golden hair. But he bestirred himself.

"You have known me, Miss Ray," he began, in a low, but steady voice, "for a long time. I remember well when I, a boy of fifteen years, carried you over the brooks, and climbed the hills for you in search of pretty flowers. You were a little maiden of ten. Ah! well do I remember those times—so happy! And I often sit and dream lovingly over them; for they

were joyous, brilliant, hopeful, halcyon days to me! And, for me, alas! they have never come again!"

He paused and bent his head as if living again in the glad hours of the past.

And Alice Ray bent her soft, dove-like eyes upon him.

"I am entirely alone, Miss Ray," continued the young man, in the same soft tone—"entirely alone in the wide world—no father to advise me, no mother to—to love me, no brother, no sister! Alone! alone! with only one friend—Clinton Craig! And yet my heart is large, and yearns for more. One word, Miss Ray," he continued, after a brief pause, "and you shall have my secret. I am well to do in this world's goods and chattels. I think that I am fairly honest, and," hesitating, "I am satisfied on two points; I have an affectionate nature, and I *love* you, Alice—God alone knows how much."

The girl started violently and made a movement as if she would arise; but, before she could say or do anything, Fred Ashe gently restrained her as he continued:

"Do not be frightened, Alice; be calm. Think for a moment, and in that moment think *well*! Remember that never before have I told woman what but now I have spoken to you; for, before high heaven, my heart has never thrilled for other than you. Pity me, Alice; but speak your own pure soul right out to me, and tell me whether there is hope for me."

While he was giving utterance to these hot, impassioned words, he had gently taken her little hand in his; but that little hand was cold, clammy and trembling.

Hastily the young man looked in her face.

"Forgive me, Alice!" he exclaimed, in an earnest, yearning tone. "Oh! pardon me, if—"

Alice quietly raised her head and gazed at him steadily and confidently.

"You have done nothing to offend me in the least, my dear friend," she said, interrupting him. "Rest assured, doctor, that your kind words have thrilled me to the very heart. I have a high appreciation of the gift which you would lay at my feet. I value highly your good opinion and your *friendship*. But, doctor, I honor you too much to hold you in needless suspense. Oh! my dear friend, forgive me when I speak it: I do not love you as you deserve, and as you mean; I cannot be your wife. You know my secret—oh! *I love another*."

She impulsively clasped the young man's nervous, chilled hands in her own pinky palms.

And over those lily hands, with the tapering fairy fingers, the young physician bowed his dark face, with its richly curling beard. And the light of hope, of life itself, seemed gone from that face as the noble head went down.

A terrible shiver passed through the well-knit frame, a vague uncertain tremor shook Fred Ashe like a sheaf of wind-blown barley; then he was calm and quiet again. Slowly he lifted his head; his almost bloodless face gradually regained its wonted hue; and when he spoke it was in his same old genial tones.

"Heaven bless you, Alice! heaven bless you for your kind words. The struggle is over, and the ambitious light that glowed in my heart has been extinguished, alas! forever; the fires of love will never again be kindled for mortal woman. To be your friend, your brother, Alice, is now all that I crave."

The maiden's eyes were suffused with hot, welling tears, and a stifled sob broke from her lips. She spoke no word.

"And now, Alice, trust me with *your* secret; trust me as a brother, and I will never fail you. I half suspect, nay, almost know; yet from your own lips I would learn the truth: who is he to whom your young heart has gone out? Tell me, and my earnest prayers shall be for your happiness and his."

For a moment the trembling maiden cast down her eyes; she seemed to hesitate, to be almost afraid to speak. But, at last, frankly, naively, while the pearly tears still coursed down her peachy cheeks, she answered:

"I will trust you, doctor; I love—nay, I adore Clinton Craig! *my* Clinton!"

"Clinton Craig? Good heavens, Alice!" and the young man reeled back. "And, Minerva Clayton! how can you— Ha! 'sh! some one comes. Quick, Alice; here—behind the scene. Quick. We'll wait until they pass."

In an instant the two had glided noiselessly behind the friendly screen on the opposite side of the passage.

Just then a couple slowly approached, arm-in-arm. One was an elegant-looking gentleman, the other a magnificent woman. They seated themselves upon the bench which had just been vacated.

But neither these two, nor those just gone, noted a tall, dark figure standing not twenty feet away, enveloped in the heavy shadows that lay along the passage.

CHAPTER VI.

NIGHT-WHISPERINGS.

At this point we must go back a little way in our story, and follow the two mysterious walkers, whom we have seen skulking along over the snow-covered drives of Fairmount Park. It will be remembered that after briefly pausing under the gloomy arch of the Girard avenue bridge, they again braved the wind and storm, and pushed on around the huge rock, with its bold, hard face, standing up like some gray-walled giant of the night. They hurried around the neighboring bend, and entered a low, unpretending house, situated almost on the water's edge.

That house—now long since gone—was well known some years ago, to all who passed up and down the Schuylkill. It was a frequent resort for boats'-crews and their fair company. Many a carousal had taken place there, and drunken orgies had reached far into the night, swelling hoarse and riotous over the sleeping waters.

Every old house must have its dark tales; this was no exception to the rule. It too had its legends and its horrors. Yet, until ten o'clock in the evening, all was quiet and orderly, and the delicate suppers of "catfish and coffee"—one of the treats of Schuylkill life—were decorously served by the matronly proprietress and her tidy-looking serving-maids. But it was *after* ten o'clock—in fact from that hour until the rosy dawn—that the noisy bacchanals were held, and the wild, sometimes terrible scenes were enacted.

The matronly proprietress was then a changed creature; her features would no longer wear the motherly, insinuating smile, and the sudden hardness of her tones told the true, rude, masculine character of the woman.

After that magic hour, the company, too, was changed; gallant youths with their red-cheeked sweethearts no longer frequented the warm, brilliantly-lighted little reception-room. The truth is that such company as this latter was never admitted at such an hour, the house, *apparently*, was shut to all. For those who had rowed on to the "Falls," on returning, would see no lights flashing from the windows of the old house, everything there was silenced in darkness, and no sound could be heard in that direction save the deep baying of a watchdog booming over the waters.

Yet there were those who asserted, with a mysterious air, that, on more than one occasion, they had seen a strange glimmer flash forth over the rippling river, at a late hour of a stormy night. More than that; they had heard shouts and rousing songs as if coming from some mad revelry, echoing in the dreamy solitude.

There were those, too, who frequented the house after ten o'clock—brawny-armed, rough-looking men—who went there stealthily on foot; and some went in rude, heavy boats. Those men came, and departed quietly; and they always brought or carried away packs. In their belts were stuck knives and pistols, and the fellows seemed watchful and suspicious. Before day, however, all was quiet, and as still as the grave in the old house. Perhaps its occupants were wrapped in slumber.

Old Moll—her last name was known to none.

save, perhaps, to herself—was a singular personage, one, at first view, prepossessing to such a degree that the gay-hearted young barge-men on the river knew her familiarly, almost affectionately, as Mother Moll; but at other times and under other circumstances, and to other of her acquaintances, she was known by another name.

In due time the reader will learn that other name—and whether or not it was deserved.

To resume; the two men disappeared in the gloom of a narrow passageway. But they paused to shake the snow from their garments and feet.

"Glad we're under cover, Algy, my boy!" muttered one of the fellows, kicking his heavy boots against the rude flooring.

"And I; but what keeps the old woman? She must know that after such a tramp, we must be half-frozen."

"Bloody Moll doesn't care a button for that! She's independent of us, Algy. But—yes; here she comes at last, and— No; that is a man's walk."

The two crouched close against the damp wall, as the door at the end of the passage was gently opened and closed, and a tall, heavy figure suddenly loomed up in the uncertain spectral haze flung into the dark place by the glimmering snow. The prowlers scarcely breathed, but clung close to the wall, as the man strode hurriedly and boldly out into the open air. As could be indistinctly seen, he was clothed coarsely, his gigantic person being wrapped in a common, cheap blanket. A moment later his firm footfall, crunching in the crusty snow, had died away.

"That was Black Ben, Algy," whispered the man called Tom. "I knew his figure, his walk. What the deuce is the fellow doing here?"

"At the old business—*ours*, Tom, or worsel I don't like the villain; he would chop my throat or yours for a quarter-dollar. We must keep our eyes on that man; he watches us. Perhaps we'll come out of the game even and square. But Moll—confound the old witch! is getting impudent; she gives us cold comfort!"

"Ay! Bloody Moll knows that your money is out—*that* luck is against you, that's all, Algy."

"The old hag! But I'll have money; yes, I swear I'll have it. However, kick on that door, Tom; maybe that will stir up the old bel-dame."

Tom did as directed; he applied his coarse boot vigorously to the stout oaken panel—and again and again. At last shuffling feet were heard inside. Then the well-barred door was cautiously opened; but it was almost immediately fastened with a large check chain.

"Who are you, and what's your business?" asked a rough, masculine voice in a hoarse growl.

"By Jove! that's cool, Moll!" answered the tall man, shaking the door vexatiously. "Certainly you were expecting us. Let us in, my beauty; we are already half frost-bit."

"Ah! 'tis you, captain, and your shadow, the squint-eye! Ha! ha! But come in; I had not forgotten you."

As she spoke she opened the door, at the same time springing on the light of a small bull's-eye night lantern. The rays fell upon the woman's figure. She was a large, coarse-looking creature, dressed in a very slipshod style. Her head was capless and bare, her thin iron-gray locks flaunting about her head in the wind-blasts that swept rudely in.

The light likewise revealed a huge naked knife thrust into a wide belt of soft chamois skin, strapped around her portly waist.

"None of your compliments, Moll," muttered Tom, after a pause, as he entered the doorway. "You may some day make free an inch or so too much with me. Then you know there'd be a chance of your taking a cold, that's all!"

He spoke gruffly and half menacingly.

"Ha! ha! ha! man; I did but joke," laughed the brawny woman. "But harkee, my child,"

and she sunk her voice to a whisper as she put her lips to the fellow's ear, "old Moll knows secrets! But supposing she didn't, why you are a wisp of straw under this muscle! only a cabbage-head under this knife!"

As she growled these words, she bent her herculean right arm, making the flexor muscles swell grandly under the loose sleeve, while she pointed grimly to the knife in her girdle.

Jem started slightly; but he quickly recovered himself.

"I know you, Moll—you and your power," he muttered. "But I allow that you know me, too; don't forget it. However, we'll not quarrel; let's be friends, old girl."

"Agreed," answered the woman, readily with a chuckle, as she turned away toward a narrow staircase leading up into the house.

"Go ahead—go first, captain, and you Jem; you know my rule," she said, decidedly, as she paused and pointed the way.

"Suspicious still, Moll? Certainly you can trust us," said the captain.

"Suspicious? Yes, I am. I wouldn't trust *myself*—if I had MONEY! Go on, now; 'tis getting a trifle late."

The men hesitated no longer; they approached the stairs at once. As the captain put his foot on the lowest step he suddenly turned, and, looking the woman straight in the face, asked, sternly:

"What was Black Ben doing here, Moll?"

The woman was somewhat startled at first; but she soon rallied, and answered, defiantly:

"On his own business; and that's none of yours, captain."

"Nay, nay; that answer 'll not do, Moll," said the other, firmly. "Let me impress it upon you that I am not to be trifled with. What business brought Black Ben here? He is no friend to me, and I trust him only when I can see him, and can cover his heart with a pistol."

"Tell me the truth, Moll."

The woman was evidently nervous as the tall, black-bearded man towered almost threateningly above her.

"I'll speak the truth; but *don't* force me, captain!" she replied, sternly. "Black Ben came here to bring *prog*. Before Heaven, that's all! You know, there are a few canalers yet on the river."

"Yes; all right, Moll; we'll believe you. Come, Jem; we must have our little talk, and be quick with it, too. You know I have other business—in town—yet."

Without another word the three ascended the stairs. The men paused on the landing above, by a room door.

"Now you can go to bed, and sleep well, Moll," said the captain, significantly. "Here is another dollar, and—good-night; we will lock up when we go."

The woman turned at once, and ascended another staircase leading to the second story. She answered not a word.

The men entered the room, closed the door securely and struck a light. The furniture of that apartment, strange to say, was elegant in the extreme; velvet sofas, rosewood chairs, bookcases containing choice volumes, a rich Turkey carpet that would have done honor to the Girard House, and a center-table of ormolu, on which stood backgammon boards, and chessmen of cunning workmanship, were to be seen there. No painting or engraving, however, adorned the plain, bare walls; and no curtains were hung before the narrow window—only one, and that looking out over the river.

There was one striking peculiarity about the room. Outside of the single window was another; it was made of sheet-iron, and between the outside ordinary and the inside extraordinary window, bars of iron, only an inch apart, descended from the heavy sill above. These bars were down now, and both windows closed.

"Old Moll is cautious!" muttered the captain, as he threw aside his heavy overcoat and stretched his sinewy limbs as if glad of the comfort around him.

This man, who has already been so long before the reader, was a tall, fine-looking fellow, with a dark, tanned face, and a thick, curling, glossy beard. His eyes were large and lustrous; yet they condemned him; for from them shone the restless fires of a treacherous and desperate nature.

His companion was a much shorter man, powerfully built, with broad shoulders and long, muscular arms. His face was a riddle; it was difficult to read the tale it told—whether the fellow was courageous or craven, whether he was innocent or crime-stained. That face was broad and sensual, yet it was almost entirely concealed by a rough red beard, growing profusely, even up to his eyes. Those eyes were crossed, or askint; and they gave the doubtful, puzzling appearance to his countenance.

"Yes, the old woman is cautious, Algy," he answered, casting his coarse overcoat upon one of the rich sofas; "and she has reason to be. Suppose, as we do, Algy," he continued, in a lower voice, "that *everybody* knew what this old rat-nest hides—the piles of gold, and—"

"Sh! sh! Jem; none of that. You must not speak of what you don't know," interrupted the other, looking at his companion with a meaning glance.

"Exactly, Algy; we know nothing of Bloody Moll—*perhaps*! But she, good soul, serves our purpose and we must use her."

"Or, be assured, she'll use us, Jem," returned the captain, earnestly. "I sometimes distrust her; for woman is woman, the world over, and, as woman, is weak."

"True as preaching, Algy. And this old minx holds little secrets of *ours*."

"Well, well, Jem, we'll keep our eyes open. And who can tell the ending of all this? Yes, who?"

"Neither of us can, Algy; that's certain; though we may live to see it."

The last words were uttered in a low, deep tone.

For a moment there was a pause. But suddenly the captain exclaimed, as if he had been dreaming:

"I forgot something. Here, Jem, go down to the cellar and get a pitcher of ale—also some crackers and cheese; I feel tired and faint. Confound the old woman! She locks up the wine and brandy. And here—leave the score on the tap, Jem."

As he spoke, he tossed the man a few coins. Jem picked them up, and taking a large silver pitcher from a glittering sideboard in a corner of the room, turned toward the door. As his hand rested on the knob, he turned his head quickly and cast a hurried, suspicious glance back at his companion.

But the captain's face was calm and imperturbable.

Jem opened the door and went out. He was standing now in a darkness that was almost impenetrable. But he did not hurry away. Carefully, adroitly, he moved a small block working in a groove in the door and peered in. Still, however, the dark-bearded man who sat within by the table, moved not limb or muscle; he seemed to be pondering some weighty subject.

With a satisfied shrug, Jem softly descended the stairs in quest of the ale.

As soon as he had gone from the door, and his heavy footfall echoed on the stairs, the captain smiled grimly. That man had the eyes of a hawk, and the ears of a cat. He had noted the suspicious glance of his partner, had marked that his steps had paused outside of the door; he had heard them distinctly, too, when they had moved away.

His smile was, indeed, very grim.

"Jem is suspicious!" he muttered, while his white teeth glistened behind his swart mustache. "He distrusts me; he knows that I hold him by the throat—that I stand between him and the unavailing of a terrible secret of the past. To offset this, he has scarcely nothing to— Yet, methinks he has enough against me. Ah! Jem Walton, we are friends and allies, and we must serve one another; yet, how

long, how long? But at bottom we are foes, and we are pitted against one another. I'll be on my guard with this man."

He drew a small repeating pistol from a side pocket, and raising the hammer to a half-cock, carefully examined the chambers of the weapon. Satisfied with his scrutiny, he thrust the firearm back into its hiding-place, and arising, strode slowly around the room. He paused as he reached a corner of the apartment furthest from the door, and passed his ear cautiously along the wall. Again he paused—and very suddenly. Reaching his hand above his head, he pressed steadily on a particular portion of the hard, bare wall.

As if by magic, a section of the plastered surface, representing the space of two square feet, suddenly slid upward, leaving a black, yawning cavity. Up through this dark hole, the hoarse wash of rushing water echoed distinctly.

The man, with a slight shudder, drew back, and pressed again upon the wall. The section immediately glided down, and the dark secret—whatever it was—was shut out.

Just then steps sounded faintly on the stairway without, and, a moment later, the door was opened by Jem, who had returned with the ale and refreshments. But now the captain was striding meditatively up and down the room.

"Coarse fare, Jem!" he ejaculated, as, laughing low, he glanced at the crackers and cheese. "But we must be content with it—for a time, at least. After all, it gives energy and strength."

"'Twill do now, Algy," answered his companion. "But it will be better when luck changes. Then you must not forget me."

"Never fear on that score," replied the captain, half-sternly. "But the luck has not changed yet; don't forget that, too. Now to business. Fall to, Jem."

The men drew chairs by the table, and having emptied two large glasses, each, of the foaming beverage without breathing, commenced an immediate attack upon the bread and cheese. Then followed a low, hurried, and earnest conversation. At last there came a pause; but it was of short duration; for the captain looked up and said, while a dark frown overspread his face:

"It shall be so! I'll scruple at nothing! Minerva Clayton, haughty, heartless flirt as she is, shall be mine. In my own way, I love the girl—love her for her beauteous person, for the glitter and show she'll make. She pretends to despise me now. Perhaps she does. If so, it is because I have no money. Ah! but she likes my homage and adoration well enough. And money! I'll have it, Jem Walton; I swear it. Ah! Clinton Craig, you are treading on dangerous ground when you stand between me and what belongs to me. I'll hesitate at nothing now, and— Ha!"

He stopped very abruptly, and rising slowly, darted like lightning to the door. A moment and he had flung it open; and with the bound of a tiger he sprung upon some one outside.

"Aha! Bloody Moll!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse, angry whisper. "You are fond of eavesdropping. But you know not the man you are trifling with. Off with you! go to bed at once!" and he stamped his foot, furiously.

"I heard some one in the cellar, and—"

"Stopped at this door to find out who it was!" sternly interrupted the man. "No, no! trifle not with me! Off!—to your room at once."

He spoke authoritatively.

"Begone! or you'll catch a severe cold uncommon quick," growled Jem, who had drawn near.

Without any reply the old woman turned obediently and went up-stairs.

The conference between the two plotters lasted only a few minutes longer. At a late hour they noiselessly left the house, having extinguished the lights, and took their way rapidly back toward the city.

As soon as they had gone, a dusky form emerged from the gloom of the passageway,

and followed on behind them. For a brief moment he turned on the light of a dark-lantern to see how to fasten the door. But brief as was that moment, it was sufficient to reveal the hideous face and form of a negro of herculean proportions.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ASSAULT BY THE RESERVOIR.

THE two plotters—such they evidently were—pursued their way at a brisk pace through the storm. They did not pause to look back until they reached the little bridge leading over the reservoir flood-gate by the mill-walk. Here they stopped. They had not spoken on the way at all; they needed all the breath that they could husband. But they paused here on the bridge amid the snow that was still whirling wildly in the thick night air.

"Here we part, Jem," said the tall man in a low voice. "Don't forget *your* work; I'll attend to mine. We are working together; we must be free and open to each other."

"I hear you, Algy," was the reply. "I am yours to command."

"Good. Remember the back entrance, and the *place where to search*. With what you'll look for—and must find—in our possession, all will be well. As for the rest, count on me; I'll not flinch. Should we fail"—hesitatingly—"in the search, why the other means must be tried; and by the heavens above me, I'll lay the train to-night, for the fellow is fiery and foolhardy."

"You can trust me, Algy."

"Then don't forget to-morrow evening. We'll meet at the Locks and report progress. Good-night and good luck!"

"Good-night, Algy."

The man then turned to the left and hurrying away entered Green street at its terminus. His crunching footfall died speedily away.

The captain lingered for a moment. But, with a shiver, he drew his cloak more closely around him and descended the steps leading into the walk by the wheels. Before he had advanced a dozen steps, however, he paused and peered ahead of him in the heavy shadows flung by the houses.

A dark object was dimly visible in that uncertain gloom; it was hugging close to the wall. The prowler quietly slid his hand toward his bosom, and taking out his revolver, dropped it into his overcoat side-pocket. He strode boldly on once more, as if he had seen nothing. But he kept his eyes well about him.

It was lucky for him that he did, for scarcely had he reached the middle of the dreary walk when suddenly, like the fierce onset of a tiger, a stalwart man rushed upon him. The attack was so sudden and so vigorous, that the young man had not time to use his pistol. He managed to extricate his hands from his pockets and to wave off a powerful blow.

Then began a fierce struggle, there in the wild winter storm. No one was awake in the neighborhood. The inmates of the adjacent lodge-house were long since wrapt in slumber; and the encounter, though desperate, was carried on silently—the thick, leaden air conveying no sound. The men were left to themselves to fight out the bitter conflict. Nothing was heard save the sickening thud of heavy blows given and returned with fearful distinctness.

The captain, though taken somewhat at a disadvantage at the beginning of the encounter, steadily gained on his powerful adversary. Though plainly a much lighter man than his antagonist, yet he towered his equal in height; it seemed, too, that his muscles and sinews were of steel. Gradually he had opened the offensive, and was now slowly, but surely, pressing his brawny foe backward, toward the wire railing girding the deep, black-bosomed basin. There was a hideous energy in that man's iron grip, as, inch by inch, he bore his antagonist backward. The fellow saw his danger—the evident meaning of the other, and now with a fierce desperation he sought to end

the conflict by breaking away and taking to flight—to flee from the danger which he had courted by the attack.

To this end he suddenly relaxed his hold, and dropping his full weight, bowed his head and endeavored to trip the other. For this maneuver he was rewarded by a fierce kick in the face which sent him blinded and stunned, head-foremost, into the snow. Like a hawk the young man pounced upon his prostrate foe and clutching him by the throat dragged him to the railing,

"Spare me—spare me, mars cap'en! Spare me! I was hired to—"

"Spare you! you black scoundrel! Never! Over with you—go!" exclaimed the young man, bending him backward. Then suddenly seizing him by the feet, with one vigorous shove he hurled him headlong over the railing into the dark, treacherous reservoir.

The wretched fellow—by his dialect, evidently a negro—gave one wild shriek as he flashed out of sight in the shadows below. In a second a half-thud and half-splash broke the stillness. The partly congealed, snow-rotten bosom of the basin gave way, and with a sudden plunge and a fearful stifling cry, the man sunk beneath the chilling waters.

Then all was still.

Panting heavily, the victor peered over into the dark reservoir.

"Miserable coward!" he muttered between his teeth. "Gone at last, have you? And at last we are square. You sought it, you fixed your own doom. You thought I had gold about me—hal ha! Peace to your foul carcass beneath the ice!"

Turning at once, he rearranged his attire and took his way swiftly through the bare-armed trees, and passed out into the street by the wire bridge.

In a moment more he had found a passing omnibus, and was soon jolting back toward Oil City.

It was now nearly twelve o'clock; the snow was still flying, flung hither and thither wildly by the hoarsely-trooping north wind.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MIDNIGHT SOLILOQUY.

WE are not yet done with the occurrences of this eventful night—so cold, so raw, so never-to-be-forgotten! Yes, it was the same night still; and the rude winter wind blowing so bleak from the northwest sung dolefully around, the splendid mansion of Thompson Floyd, Esq., just as it sighed and moaned, and piped and waved around the humbler dwelling-places up the alley, nearly.

The hour was half-past eleven; all the lights were extinguished in the splendid Spruce street mansion, save the one which glowed in the rich man's library.

In that apartment where everything was collected to contribute to the comfort and pander to the taste of a man of culture and of leisure sat the owner of the mansion.

Thompson Floyd was a tall, slender man of about fifty-five years of age. His face was long, thin and pale; his forehead narrow and high, was crowned with scattering gray locks, now awry and disordered. The countenance of the man showed anxiety and care—a remembrance of bitter things, perhaps; yet it was not an austere, unkind face. The emotions now playing over his countenance were varied and confused.

Directly in front of the gentleman, over the book-case, was the portrait of a dark-bearded, elegant-looking man, apparently of about forty years of age. He was represented as wearing the full uniform of an officer of the navy. But about the handsome face was an unmistakable air of a fast life, the mark of many sins of omission and commission.

The picture was elaborately mounted in a Florentine frame, magnificently carved and gilded. It was suspended from the wall by a red silken cord of a peculiar make and finish. This cord was of the finest mesh-work and of the costliest description. It was passed in a quadruple coil from the frame to the wall; and

from each end depended a rich and rare tassel of gold and silver fringe.

The solitary occupant of the room at length lifted his head, and fixed his eyes upon the rich portrait.

"Ah! Kimcoly!" he muttered, rising slowly and beginning to pace the room with anxious, meditative steps. "Unlucky day for me when you passed from earth, poor and penniless, leaving me such a charge! Never since the day when that dark browed boy, *my nephew*, entered these doors have I felt the same man that I was before. Even as a boy his scowling face, his deep, meaning eyes haunted me and made me *fear*. Fear? And what? Trouble, *trouble!* Would to heaven that the sea had engulfed the boy, too!" he suddenly exclaimed, with a nervous energy.

A moment of silence ensued; but it was speedily broken by the old gentleman, who resumed:

"Yes; then I had been free to do as I wished with my own. But now and ever since the Levant went down and that black-haired boy darkened my doors I have been wretched. Why did fate so ordain it, that just when my cherished plans were perfected, when my darling—when Clinton, my noble adopted son, was beginning to love me, to creep closer to the heart of—of—his best friend—poor boy!—his adopted father; ay! why then did this fiendish fate fling in my way that boy with the scowling brow, this, to the outside world, the *real heir to my wealth*. Curses on him! Curses on the day when the ship went down! Then such a legacy to a son! A rich one, forsooth, wherewith to battle with the world for fortune and success. And that fortune: a Venetian portrait, a cord of silk and a jeweled dagger! Bah!"

For a moment he glanced vindictively at the painted canvas before him. Again he resumed his restless promenade, his head bent, his thin white hands clasped convulsively behind him, his lips compressed, his eyes almost stony in their stare. At last he once more flung himself into his chair and sighing heavily murmured, abstractedly:

"Yes, darling Gertrude! I remember you yet; time cannot blot out your angel's face and your sunny curls from my memory. I hear your laughing voice now; I feel your warm breath on my cheek; and, ah! righteous heaven, I hearken even now to that low, plaintive wail, that dying moan, when I told you the cruel truth. Oh! I know that I was wrong, that pride and passion blinded me! I know—heaven curse me!—that I murdered my darling! Alas! I have fought the whirlwind and the storm which I provoked. And have I been purified in passing this mighty ordeal of heart-breaking woe? Yes; I feel it, I know it. I can now look calmly on her sweet face and can kiss those mock lips—so unlike the real!—quietly."

He drew from his bosom a small oval case of velvet, and opened it. Silently he gazed at what was contained within—a fair-haired, sky-eyed, girlish face.

An uncontrollable tremor shook the old man's frame, as he glued his eyes to the miniature; but there came forth no cry, no sob, no moan from the anguished heart. The eyes slowly filled, great salt tears rolled down the wan cheeks, and a sigh as of a blessed relief broke from his bosom. Gently, yearningly, he pressed his lips to the voiceless "shadow," then he closed the case and hid it in his pocket.

"Ah! my lost Gertrude!" he murmured, "I have yet a link to bind me to you. Oh! how precious that link. And yet, my untarnished name and fame—*untarnished!*" he continued, with a gasp. "Oh heaven! I cannot! I dare not! I—alas!" and he wrung his withered hands. "I sometimes feel as though I would end all my sorrow at once; and yet, must I resort to it, as the great consoler and quieter? What a strange feeling came over me the other day, as I stood on the lofty rock beyond Fairmount, and gazed into the dark, rushing flood of the Schuylkill! Was it fancy that made me see beneath the surging torrent a vision of peace, of rest ever-

lasting? No, no; such thoughts are cowardly; I'll banish them."

For several moments he strode without speaking up and down the room.

"*Algernon Floyd is a deep, base-hearted man!*" he suddenly muttered, his mind reverting to a former topic of thought. "His black, glittering eyes have a wicked look. He knows of my wealth, that I have no relative in a legal aspect, save himself; he knows, too, my love for my adopted son; he knows that I am master of my own, that when I die, my property will by my express declarations go in bulk to my—dear Clinton, and but a small portion to himself. I do not like his manners of late; I distrust him! He must leave this house. I cannot absolutely turn him off, for poor Kimcoly's sake. I must remember him in my will. And I—Ha! what was that?"

He paused abruptly as a quick, sharp sound echoed without the back window. He sat upright and faced the window, but the noise came not again.

"I am nervous," muttered the old man, after a moment's pause. "'Twas only the old peach tree see-sawing in the wind. No, I do not trust my nephew Algernon," he resumed, as his brow contracted. "He keeps suspicious company, is out late at nights without ostensible reasons, and he casts greedy glances at my safe. He knows that I keep my will there; he knows, too, that if I die *without a will*, HE WILL BE A MILLIONAIRE, AND CLINTON PENNILESS! But," and his voice sunk to an excited whisper, "I'll thwart the ambitious rascal, if he thinks any such thing. I'll secure that document *some-where else.*"

He arose at once and strode toward a small iron safe in a corner of the room; at the same time he thrust his hand in a concealed pocket within his vest. He paused suddenly and searched this pocket, then, hurriedly, every other about his garments.

"The key is missing!" he muttered with a look of perplexity and uneasiness. "Only last night I placed it in its hiding-place. Could I have lost it this morning at the Exchange? No; I am not so careless as that. I placed that key in my pocket, there to remain until I removed it. However, I am prepared for emergencies. I must put the extra spring on the lock; for twenty thousand dollars, and the *will*, are contained in that strong box. But I have another key."

He cautiously locked the door of the apartment, and lowered the light to the minutest point. For a moment the room was in darkness. When the light streamed on again, old Thompson Floyd was standing beneath the chandelier with a peculiar shaped key in his hand.

A moment and he was by the safe. He unlocked the ponderous door and slowly shoved it open. He drew out a long, narrow drawer and from it took a small, copper-fastened box. This box was secured with two locks. By a dexterous touch the old gentleman unclasped the locks, and threw back the lid. He took out a long, neatly folded paper, bearing an indorsement in a clear, bold handwriting. He replaced the box in the drawer, the drawer in the safe, and closed the heavy door. For an entire minute he turned the key in the lock, each time eliciting from the resonant metal a peculiar clink. At last, with a satisfied air, he withdrew the key. Again he lowered the light for a moment. When it glared once more in the room, the old man was seating himself by the table.

But the key had disappeared.

Slowly Mr. Floyd spread out the folded sheet. Then holding it up to the light he read it through, word by word.

It was a brief document, and though old Thompson Floyd read slowly, it took him but a moment to finish. He spread the paper out before him.

"It is right," he ejaculated, "as right as my conscience would allow me to draw it. I could not neglect my—adopted son; nor could I forget that Algernon Floyd was my brother's son. Heaven grant that I have done justice

to both! Heigho!" he exclaimed after a pause, glancing at the clock. "So late! half-past twelve! Well, I am not sleepy, the house is empty, Clinton and Algernon are both away at the ball! Oh! the flash and folly there! But the time offers; I'll write my *confession*, for him, and place it with the will. When I am dead he can read both; but not until then. I'll strengthen my nerves a little, then to work."

He arose and approached a small steel-banded locker. From it he took a vial and a little cut-glass decanter. From the vial he poured two teaspoonfuls of the liquid it contained into a wine-glass, which latter he half-filled with the contents of the decanter.

The vial was labeled *Tinct. Valer*; the decanter held, as could be told by the peculiar aroma, Cognac brandy.

At one swallow the old man emptied the wine glass, and after a few turns, up and down the room, reseated himself by the table and began at once to write.

And there he sat. An hour passed and still old Thompson Floyd guided the creaking goose-quill over the sheets.

At last, with a weary yawn, he flung down the pen and pushed the MS. aside. Tears stood in the old man's eyes as slowly he took up the sheets and read them one by one. When he had finished, he folded them complacently together into a small, square package, and secured it by turns of a strong cord. Next he folded the long narrow document—the will—and made it to correspond in size and shape with the package of sheets. He paused, but almost instantly he took a pen and on the parcel of folded sheets he wrote a few words. From a drawer in the table he drew out several small squares of thin rubber and parchment. Placing the will and the sheets together, making a package two inches in size, he began to intold them in alternate wrappings of the rubber and vellum, securing every third layer with a turn of twine.

Thus he continued until he had placed nine successive wrappers around the parcel. Compressing this between his hands, he bound it tightly with coil after coil of the strong cord.

Then he had finished his singular work, for he clipped the twine and laid the package aside.

The old man was almost exhausted as he bent his aged head over the table to rest himself. It was now almost one o'clock; but Mr. Floyd continued to rest his head on the table. He was asleep. How long he lay thus, he did not know; but he was suddenly awakened by a noise at the window. He quickly raised his head. Like lightning he sprung to his feet.

Half-way in the room, through the opened window, was the form of a heavy man. Wind and snow were blowing blindly into the room, and the gas-jet was flaring wildly—at times revealing everything, at times obscuring all objects.

There was no time to lose; the man was almost within the room. It was plain that he had once gained the window-sill, but had slipped—owing perhaps to the snow under his feet. It was thus that the noise which awakened the sleeper had been made.

The man's face was covered by a closely-fitting black mask; but the hands were bare, showing that the fellow was a white man. With his right hand he had grasped the ring in the shutter, while with his left he was clinging to the sill. A naked knife was clasped between his teeth.

Old Mr. Floyd grasped the iron poker by the grate, and at a bound sprung to the window. In a moment the heavy iron had descended upon the hand grasping the ring.

Flesh and blood could not stand that blow. With a howl of pain—the knife dropping from his mouth and falling inside the room—his bruised hand loosed its grasp; the left slowly relaxed its clutch, and, with a fearful imprecation, the man dashed backward into the darkness below.

The old gentleman picked up the knife. He glanced at it, and recoiled with a shudder, as he saw a name well known in the local annals of crime rudely cut upon the handle.

"My eyes are opened!" he muttered, in a tremulous tone. "This matter shall be attended to, and at an early day. But now to bed—to bed! to dream over the sad, yet happy past! Alas!"

CHAPTER IX.

LOST AND WON.

BREATHLESSLY Fred Ashe and Alice Ray stood behind the shaking canvas away back in the rear of the huge Academy.

It will be remembered by the reader, that it was there we left the two, on the approach of new-comers who readily took the vacated seats. They did not secrete themselves for the purpose of listening, but only to let the promenaders pass.

Already a few words had been spoken by those who sat on the bench.

With a half-shudder and a vague tremor pervading her fragile form, Alice Ray turned to fly from the spot; but all was darkness around her. She could not have taken a step in any direction without attracting attention. In such an event a search would be sure to result awkwardly.

Dr. Ashe leaned over and whispered in her ear to restrain herself; then he took her little hand in his own strong grasp, to encourage and reassure her.

Thus they were forced to listen, as they stood shivering in the cold wind that rattled the scenes above them.

"Nay, nay!" said the lady, in a clear, silvery voice, as she nestled close to her escort on the bench; "you jump too readily at conclusions, Clinton. You are well aware that—"

"That you will have your own way in all things, Minerva, and so in this. But it matters not; I suppose you are right."

"I am right, Clinton. Fred Ashe is no friend of mine. He does not like me; and he shows it plainly, yes, *rudely*, whenever he gets an opportunity."

"*Rudely*, Minerva!" and the young man knit his brow. "Give me a single instance, and I'll see Dr. Ashe, and request him to explain."

He spoke very seriously.

"No; it does not matter. I care nothing for the impertinent, sneering fellow. You must have no trouble with him on my account."

There was a slight pause.

"I'll be frank with you, Minerva," said Clinton, at last. "Fred is a good fellow, and a dear good friend of mine—perhaps a slightly over-zealous one, but well meaning, nevertheless; and—well, in a word he thinks you are very worldly, too fashionable, and—"

"The presumptuous pup!" broke in the girl, with a hiss. "When and where did he get an opportunity to judge me?—and falsely at that! I hate him!"

"I am candid with you, Minerva, because I know that Fred judges you harshly. He even dissuaded me from escorting you to the ball, and thought it ungenteel in me to break my engagement with Alice Ray!"

"He did? Well, well; I'll be even with Fred Ashe, M. D., some day. But, Clinton, how would *little* Alice Ray have shone on your arm to-night?"

"Not like the elegant, peerless Minerva Clayton!" was the ardent, impulsive reply.

The banker's daughter bowed her head as a half blush swept over her voluptuous face. She trembled slightly, too—mayhap with the anticipation of a speedy and a glorious triumph. She suddenly looked up.

"I am assured of one thing, Clinton," she said; "and perhaps your mind may be set at ease by my confiding it to you."

She paused, and looked at him earnestly.

"Speak on, Minerva; tell me."

"Fred Ashe loves Alice Ray, the lumberman's daughter. He adores her; and she loves him!"

"What! I—"

"Sh! hark! What is that?" whispered Minerva, as just then the rattling scenes shook violently.

Young Craig heard the noise; but it did not startle him in the least.

"It was a sudden gust of wind, Minerva. Can't you feel it?"

"Ah! yes; it was the wind. It is very chilly here."

She drew closer and more confidently toward the young man.

"Then come, we'll go, Minerva. You may—"

"No; keep still, Clinton," she interrupted, restraining him. "I am never cold or uncomfortable when in *your company*!"

The words were pointed and bold.

The young man colored; but the thrill that shot through his frame was delicious in the extreme.

"I am glad to know it, Minerva," he said, with some confusion. "Also that Alice Ray loves my friend, Dr. Ashe. To tell you the truth," and he hesitated, "we must manage to marry this little Ray girl to your enemy, the doctor, and I will then breathe freer."

"You? how?"

"Because, Minerva—well, I have more than once thought that Alice Ray has some regard for me."

Clinton Craig blushed like a woman.

"You rate yourself well, Clinton," said Minerva, rather coldly; she knew that the young man spoke the truth; and she was jealous of "little" Alice Ray—of every one who came between her ambitious self and the man whom she was working to win.

But was her love for that man genuine and self-sacrificing? Minerva asked herself this question as she sat there.

Again there was a pause.

"You, yourself, Minerva, once hinted the same to me," said the young man, somewhat resentfully.

"Yes; but I was simply talking for pastime. Enough, however, of Alice Ray; my word for it, she hates you; and I'll stake my life that she is even now engaged to Fred Ashe."

Again there was a violent shaking of the canvas; but the young folks paid no heed to it now; they knew it was nothing but the wind.

"I hope what you say is true, Minerva," remarked Clinton, emphatically.

To this the girl made no reply, but sat pondering for a moment. Suddenly she glanced toward her escort and said, slyly:

"Mr. Algernon Floyd—your cousin by adoption, Clinton—looked wondrously handsome and dignified to-night."

Young Craig started as though struck by a knife. He colored despite himself, and bit viciously at the ends his sweeping mustache.

Minerva noticed his perturbation; she seemed to enjoy it.

"I could not refuse him, when he asked me so humbly, so graciously to dance with him," she continued. "I fancy we did not make a bad looking couple, though truth be told, I like contrasts: his hair is black, so is mine. But yours, Clinton, is auburn."

The words were spoken in an insinuating, apparently artless tone, while the girl's dark eyes blazed into the young man's face.

Clinton Craig started. But a scowl passed over his face. His mind was occupied with other thoughts; it was filled with the image of his dark-browed cousin.

"I like not this fellow, Algernon Floyd?" he said, gruffly.

"Is it because he is less forward than yourself, Clinton?" asked the girl, quietly. "Is it because his uncle, his own flesh and blood, sees fit most naturally to cut him off from a just inheritance, and give the vast fortune which he has accumulated to one who is in nowise related to him?—to, you, Clinton, the creature of a whim!"

Clinton winced; he set his teeth hard together, but before he could reply, the girl continued earnestly:

"I tell you, my friend, that Algernon Floyd is no mean specimen of a man to ensnare a woman's heart; and— But then, unlucky dog!" and she checked herself, "he has no money."

She laughed lightly and scornfully.

Despite her laugh, however, she had spoken seriously, half-bitterly and enviously. Her words had found a lodgment in Clinton Craig's bosom. His brow contracted, for a moment a contemptuous sneer curled his lip and a glitter shone in his eyes.

Still Minerva laughed lightly, though she knew full well that she had gone too far, and had, under the impulse of the moment, overshoot the mark. But the girl looked surpassingly lovely as she stole her hand confidently into that of the handsome fellow who sat beside her. And that individual was not proof against such blandishment. At heart he loved the splendid woman, madly. His face slowly unwrinkled, the foreboding frown fled away, and a glad smile swept over it. He clasped the small warm hand, and murmured softly:

"Money or not, Minerva, there is only one such maiden as you in the wide world!"

She attempted to withdraw her hand, but he held it fast.

"Nor can I think, Minerva," he continued earnestly, "that you value a man simply by the size of his purse, and the credit of his check. I am not to be blamed that my adopted father has seen fit, as all say, to make me heir to his fortune. Yet this is not absolutely known as a fact. I do not begrudge Algernon Floyd anything, and if I thought I could thus secure your favor, I would gladly have him receive the entire inheritance. But, Minerva," and his voice had a stern tone of warning, "Algernon Floyd is a bad man, an envious, wicked-hearted fellow. I have heard dark tales of him. Besides, my dear Minerva," and he clasped her hand more tightly, "he does not love you—love you as I do. Oh! forgive me, darling one! I could not restrain myself."

Minerva Clayton did not move, nor did she show the least sign of displeasure. She allowed her warm, throbbing hand to remain imprisoned. Then quietly she slid her magnificent head to his shoulder, and let it nestle there.

"And do *you* love me, Clinton, dear Clinton?" she asked in a low, sweet voice, while she gazed tenderly at him.

"As life itself!" was the hot, impulsive reply. "I worship you, darling! Speak, Minerva, speak just one word. Can you not, in some degree, at least, return my love? Speak, darling one!"

He stole his arm around her yielding waist.

"Do *you* love Alice Ray—love her in the least, Clinton?" asked the maiden, softly, never removing her glowing eyes from his face.

"Not in the least! Before God and man I pledge you that not a pulse of my heart thrills for Alice Ray!"

"Then, Clinton, I am yours, yours alone, yours forever!" was the burning exclamation, the whole passionate nature of the woman bursting forth, as she lifted her ripe virgin lips to his.

And Clinton Craig bowed his head of chestnut curls over that transcendently fascinating face, and kissed those warm, red lips.

Wrapt in love's embrace, the two heeded not the violent rattling of the canvas near them; they cared not now for wind or calm. They were fairly adrift on the golden sun-lit sea of love, and they thought of naught save the balmy breezes that wafted them over its surface.

At length, gently disengaging himself from her embrace, the young man arose, and covering her half-bared shoulders with her downy opera shawl, he said:

"Enough! Come, Minerva; I am happy now. Come, the Academy is being deserted. 'Tis two o'clock, and we must wend our way homeward."

The maiden arose languidly, and slipping her arm in his they walked away toward the noise and bustle of the ball.

As Minerva Clayton glided along by the side of her handsome escort, she murmured softly, to herself:

"Won't won't!"

But Clinton Craig heard her not, for her words were but a floating breath.

Then their footsteps ceased to echo in the long passageway, and the brilliant couple had gone.

Quietly, slowly from behind the friendly scene-shift stepped Fred Ashe.

Leaning on his arm, her head bowed, her limbs trembling, her gentle bosom heaving tumultuously, walked Alice Ray.

"Bear up, Alice!" whispered the young man, encouragingly. "I am your friend, your brother. He who has so basely, so cheaply flung his affections away is not worthy of you. Forget him, Alice!"

But poor Alice answered not his brave words of cheer; she simply murmured distractedly to herself:

"Lost! lost!"

They hurried away.

Like some grim phantom that haunts the night, suddenly, quietly, a tall figure emerged from the heavy shadows hanging over the obscure passage and paused in the light of the solitary burner.

The straight pencil of light revealed the dark, saturnine features of Algernon Floyd. The fellow's face was half-wrinkled under an ominous scowl, and half-illuminated by a flash of victory.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed, grimly. "He spoke ill of me; *she*, glittering Jezebel! spoke well of me! Shall I compass both? Can I? Ye gods!" he continued, with an oath, "to the brave, 'there's no such word as fail!' Come! be still, my ambitious heart! for now the time of work has come!"

His mutterings died away as he turned and disappeared down the passage.

All was now bustle and confusion; the ball was on the wane; the hour was half-past two in the morning, and many eyes, so bright and flashing a few brief hours before, were now dull and lusterless.

The great event was near its close.

Shawls, furs, muffs, rubbers, etc., etc., were again in requisition; and carriages, stretching out almost an interminable length on Locust street, were departing moment by moment laden with their precious living freight.

Clinton Craig was in the coat-room hunting out the articles demanded by his check. Fred Ashe was there too, already buttoned up and gloved, prepared for the wintry weather without. The physician's face was sad and serious. But Clinton was all life and fire; his face was radiant with a well-won triumph.

At that moment, Algernon Floyd, lofty and gloomy, entered.

The room was crowded with bustling, hurrying beaux, old and young, and each one was intent on his own business.

The dark-browed Floyd walked by young Craig, and, watching his opportunity, deliberately whisked his cane across the young man's cheek.

In an instant Craig's face was crimson; then it grew as pallid as a moonlit grave-stone as he looked up and saw Algernon Floyd.

"Please be careful, sir," he said, sternly, as the other paused.

"Careful?" sneered Floyd. "I was careful enough, my fancy fledgling, to strike you in the face—just as I intended to do."

Dr. Ashe heard all this. He moved promptly forward.

"Dirty hound that you are!" exclaimed Clinton, striding toward his insulter.

Before the doctor could interfere, the two strong men had exchanged blows. There is no telling how the disgraceful affair would have terminated had not the bystanders separated the combatants.

"Shame on you, Algernon Floyd, to have provoked this disturbance!" exclaimed young Fred Ashe, with flushed cheeks.

Floyd's dusky face glowed with passion as he retorted:

"Wait till this is ended, sir, and I promise to accommodate you. As for you, Clinton Craig, you shall not escape thus easily! I swear it!"

With a mocking bow, he strode proudly and defiantly from the room.

Clinton Craig was trembling with passion,

but he controlled himself; and linking his arm in that of his friend, he bowed and left the apartment.

Ten minutes later, apparently undisturbed, happy and exultant again, he was jolting away in a carriage with Minerva Clayton. And that peerless maiden, her hand in his, murmured softly to herself:

"Won't won't!"

But poor stricken Alice Ray, seated beside Dr. Ashe in the carriage that was conveying them homeward, only bowed her tearful face, and muttered:

"Lost! lost!"

CHAPTER X. THE COUNCIL.

THE day after the great event at the Academy was one that is remembered almost as vividly as the ball itself; for on the morning of that day, it is said, that more fashionable young ladies and gentlemen slumbered later than on any previous occasion in the memory of man; that there were more headaches than ever before, and that never before were so many *blase*, entirely used up people seen. And all on account of the ball, and the vigorous manner marking its enjoyment.

It is not handed down how late Clinton Craig slept that morning; but the faithful chronicler of the times records that Minerva Clayton, the bank-president's daughter, did not make her appearance until the following morning.

With Fred Ashe, however, it was different. He was promptly in his office by half-past seven in the morning; and, strange to say, the first call he received was from old Albert Ray, the lumber-merchant, who gravely informed him that Alice was ill.

Dr. Ashe looked anxious and worried. Late on the night before, as he had said good-night to Alice, at her door, he had noticed that her hand was hot, dry and tremulous. The truth is, he somewhat expected the call this morning. But he answered cheerfully:

"Very good, Mr. Ray; I'll soon be there. I dare say it is nothing—over-fatigue and," hesitatingly, "some little mental disquietude, perhaps. But I'll call, certainly, by nine o'clock."

When the old gentleman had gone, the physician strode uneasily up and down his office. There was a singular commingling of emotion on his fine, manly face. An expression of anxiety—almost of fear—was blended with a frown, a real scowl. But his mind was soon diverted—patients dropping in one by one; for Fred Ashe was both skillful and popular. Young though he was, he was already almost worshiped as a "rising sun."

As those who needed his aid came in, the young man's brow gradually cleared, the frown passed away, and the wonted words of cheer and encouragement fell from his lips.

Dr. Ashe was glad that his mind was, temporarily at least, turned into other channels. But at last his office was emptied. Glancing at the clock he snatched his overcoat and hat and turned to the door. It was half-past nine o'clock; and he had promised to be at Mr. Ray's, at Sixth and Vine, by nine! His hand was on the bolt, when the bell rung with a startling clamor. He opened the door and looked out.

"From Mr. Craig, sir," he said, handing a sealed envelope to the physician.

Fred Ashe tore open the letter, and hastily read it through. When he had finished it, a frown came over his face; and that frown grew darker as he spread out another sheet contained in the envelope, and perused it likewise. But folding the two hastily together, he cast them in a desk, and said to the messenger:

"Very good, Henry; tell Mr. Craig that 'tis all right."

The man bowed and left, while Dr. Ashe hurried at break-neck speed from his office, which was near the corner of Thirteenth and Arch streets.

The truth is—and this may account for his haste—despite her refusal of his proposal, and her confession of love for Clinton Craig, Alice Ray was still very dear, very close to Fred Ashe.

We will lay the notes which the physician had received before the reader, despite the fact that the young man had locked them in a desk. The first read thus:

"DEAR FRED:—I am writing this in bed. I am rather used-up this morning, and have no idea of turning out till the afternoon. I shall certainly take a good nap after sending you this. Well, Fred, I am afraid I am in trouble. That black villain (villain he is!) is in earnest about that affair of last night, which, 'pon my soul, I had forgotten. He has some ulterior motive in pushing the affair further. I suspect what it is; but it is so dark, so dastardly and treacherous, that I'll not write it. I'll tell you of it when you come. I would get out of the affair, just where it stands—considering my honor untarnished—were I allowed to; but the fellow will not thus be satisfied, though he was the aggressor. I am situated peculiarly and unpleasantly; I would not offend my adopted father; yet I am loth to balk this fellow, especially as he makes a half-appeal to my manhood; ay! and the cur threatens me in case I refuse. Were I to follow the wicked inclinations of my heart, I would shoot the rascal on sight; but I will wait and talk with you. So come see me this evening. Don't disappoint me; I'll certainly expect you here.

"Yours in haste and half-asleep, C. C."

The other note ran as follows:

"CLINTON CRAIG, ESQ.:

"SIR:—I promised you a half-hour ago that you should hear from me again. I never forget, and never break a promise. I hereby challenge you to mortal combat—the only mode to settle differences that is open to gentlemen; your social status places you in that category. I notify you thus early of my demand upon your time and pleasure, so that you may be prepared to receive my friend, who will call as soon as practicable. I need not say that should you see fit to decline the proposed meeting, you can easily do so by informing your adopted father, *my uncle*, of the matter. Should you do so, I shall publish you as a coward, and slap your face in the streets. I take the liberty of shoving this under your door at this, perhaps, unseasonable hour—three o'clock in the morning.

"Respectfully, etc., ALGERNON FLOYD."

We will follow Dr. Ashe.

At last turning up Sixth street, he was, in a few moments, on the steps of Mr. Ray's residence. He rung, and was admitted at once by the old gentleman himself, who was so anxious about his daughter, that he had not, as was his wont, gone to his lumber-yard, lying in the Richmond district.

"You are late, doctor—almost an hour behind time; and Alice is ill—worse than she was this morning."

The young physician hastily made his excuses, and entered the house. In a few moments he was stepping softly in the room of the sick girl; then he paused by the bedside. He laid his hand quickly upon the burning brow from which the golden tresses were swept back. Next his finger sought the tell-tale pulse. A few questions rapidly put and answered, and the doctor wrote a hurried prescription.

"She talks wild at times, doctor," whispered the anxious father; "and she calls piteously for her poor dead mother! It makes me sad enough. Is she seriously ill, doctor, my friend?"

"She is ill, Mr. Ray; I never deceive. She is unconscious now; she has brain fever."

The physician spoke quietly; but it was in a deep, feeling voice.

"Good heaven!" groaned the old man, his iron nature giving way. "She is my all, doctor! my all in all. Oh! should she be taken from me!"

"Be calm, Mr. Ray; quiet yourself. I said she was ill; I did not say that there was immediate danger. I will watch her closely—very closely, sir; for"—stammering awkwardly—"I am much interested in your daughter."

Alice was indeed unconscious; she was delirious; her mind wandered; she mentioned a name.

Fred Ashe hastily led the old father from the room, and, closing the door, left the sufferer alone for a moment.

By this time, the messenger had returned with the medicine ordered. The doctor taking it, returned to the sick room. Slowly he placed a teaspoonful of the mixture between the poor girl's lips, and allowed it to trickle down her throat. He watched the effect with eager eyes. It was not immediate, and he administered another dose. Once more he waited and watched.

Soon the breathing became less hurried, a gentle perspiration appeared on the dry, hot forehead, the wild, incoherent mutterings ceased, and, turning on her side, the maiden sunk into a deep sleep.

As a happy, satisfied expression swept over his face, the doctor stole softly from the room. Leaving full directions, and promising to call again at noon, he left the house.

The day wore away, and the shades of another night settled over the snow draped earth. The bleak north wind was again trooping through the streets, and shaking the frozen branches of the leafless trees in the squares.

Just above the canal-lock beyond the Schuylkill dam on the west bank of the river, stood at the time of which we write, a small hotel; it was not very reputable to say the least. It was a small, insignificant establishment, only two stories high, and with one or two out-houses attached. The rear door and windows looked directly on the black waters of the canal. The house was known by the name of the "Locks," but we are particular that it must not be confounded with the present fine building standing on the same site, and bearing the same name. The "Locks" to which we refer was, one night in the winter of 1858, destroyed by fire.

In the barroom of this tavern, on the night to which our attention is directed, seated by a table on which stood a brandy-bottle and glasses, were two men. They were talking earnestly together, in a low, guarded tone. One of them had his right hand swathed in a bandage; and both were what might be emphatically termed rough-looking customers. They were clad in coarse, heavy garments, large waterproof coats, while their faces were partly concealed under wide slouched hats.

But the hand of one of these men—the taller—as he toyed with the common green glass tumbler, was white, soft, and evidently unaccustomed to labor.

"Drink, Jem," he said, with a lively rally; "'twill do you good and raise your spirits; though, hang it! I must curse your stupid, blundering work."

The man addressed started.

"Stupid, Algy!" he repeated, as a darkling frown gathered on his brow. "I did my best. And let me tell you, you could have done no more. Then, too, if it hadn't been for the infernal snow under my boot-heel, I'd have brought a different report to you."

"I am sorry enough for it, Jem; for never again will there be such a chance. Now, we must hurry up the work, must carry out our plans. And if we succeed, why, Jem Walton will be a rich man in ten days!"

"True enough, but you, Algy? What will you be?" asked the other, covertly.

"Rich, too; richer than you, Jem; but then I will be more entitled to it, do you see?"

"Yes, yes; all true. But," and he lowered his voice as he glanced hastily around him, "suppose I were to tell tales?"

He glanced meaningly at the other.

"Try it," replied his companion, in a husky whisper. "Ay! begin right here, and now! and see how far you'll go."

As he spoke, he half-drew a short, heavy revolver from his pocket. The black muzzle of the weapon covered Jem, while the tall man's right hand, concealed in the bosom of his rough overcoat, was upon the lightly set trigger.

No one in the room—and there were several—saw the movement, save the man for whom it was intended. The half-drunken *canalers*—as the boatmen were called—were otherwise engaged at this minute.

Jem cowered back.

"I tell you, Jem Walton, take care," pursued the other; "or you'll some day get a dose that'll lay you up. Besides, were I inclined, I could tell something; my hand is on your throat. Why, man, I could hang you in an hour's time! Did I not see something in the woods back of Glou—"

"And I; did I not see Black Ben—"

"Enough, Jem—enough!" interrupted the other hoarsely, and glancing meaningly at his companion. "We have *both seen*, and we are square—with a little balance in my favor. We must not, shall not, quarrel."

The tall man was plainly inclined to a compromise; and Jem, already alarmed and nervous, was willing to acquiesce.

"All right, Algy," he answered, promptly. "We mustn't quarrel—as long as we are of use to one another! And now, Algy, as I have told you of my confounded slip-up, let me know a trifle of *your* doings."

"Agreed, and soon told; but the brandy is out. Let's have more. Your score this time, Jem, for I am out of tin."

"All right, Algy; I'm square," was the reply, as the rough fellow rapped on the table.

The summons was speedily obeyed, and the liquor supplied.

A long conversation, in a guarded undertone, ensued.

"Black Ben is a wicked chap to deal with, Algy; and the rascal keeps a sharp knife. He knows how to use it, too. My advice, if it's worth taking, is: keep out of his way, or shoot him in the back, some dark night."

Jem uttered these words very coolly.

"You are right, my friend. Well, perhaps I was wrong," he continued, after a slight pause, "that cold night, years ago; but the confounded she-devil, she—"

"I know all about it, Algy—I *was there!*" interrupted the other, softly. "But now, Algy, about this other business—*this excursion on the river*, eh? Yes—and that fracas with that rich chap at the ball?"

"'Tis all arranged. Heaven grant that the river will not freeze over for a week? As to the other affair, why, *you* will wait on that fancy fellow to-morrow. He *shall* fight. I have an engagement with that confounded old uncle of mine to-morrow evening. What he wants with me, the deuce only knows; I don't. But I'll be there when— Well, you know what; and I can report progress."

"Clinton Craig is a good shot, Algy! I have seen some of his fine work in the galleries."

"Good shot! Bosh! man, what am I? But, in your ear, Jem, Clinton Craig *will never pull trigger on me.*"

"I think I understand you, Algy. You are wise, too."

"Well, come; 'tis getting late. You have the letters and know what to do with them. Remain here until I am gone; then hurry to the old rendezvous. Good-night and good luck!"

He arose and left the tavern.

As soon as he stood without he hurried away in the direction of the wire bridge.

CHAPTER XI.

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning when Algernon Floyd, calm and self-possessed, stood at the door of the library in his rich uncle's mansion. He rapped lightly. For a moment he waited; then a voice within bade him enter. He turned the bolt and walked boldly, almost defiantly, into the room.

Old Thompson Floyd was seated at the table; he was evidently nervous and disturbed; but at the same time a firm expression hovered over his face. He started somewhat and eyed his nephew suspiciously as he entered. Then, at a glance, he measured the distance between his hand and the bell-cord on the wall. Next he flashed a look toward a half-open drawer in which lay a loaded pistol.

The young man stood quietly awaiting the old gentleman's pleasure.

"Good-morning, Algernon; be seated," said Mr. Floyd.

"Thank you, uncle," was the cold reply, as the speaker negligently flung himself into a chair at the further side of the room. "I am here, sir, in obedience to your request. I thought the present as good a time as this evening. If it be convenient, please tell me your

wishes, and as soon as you can. I am busy this forenoon."

Algernon Floyd spoke very calmly.

"Ah!" ejaculated the uncle, with a half-grunt. "I promise not to keep you long; but I am glad that you say you have business. You should not have been idle so long."

These words were uttered harshly.

The young man felt them and their tone, for though his face neither paled nor flushed, yet a menacing frown wrinkled his brow as he replied:

"That is no fault of mine, sir. I have endeavored, as you know, to obtain employment—something that is not dishonorable or—"

"Dishonorable! Nonsense, Algernon! No employment, no labor is dishonorable, provided it be honest. There are plenty of places for you in this great city, provided you will search for them. I must say I do not like the lazy, shiftless life that you are leading. Were I in your place, I would carry a hod rather than be dependent on any man for bread—even on an uncle!"

A hot, angry flush leaped to the young man's face as he replied:

"You are unnecessarily harsh, sir. Nature has made me your nephew. It strikes me that Clinton Craig, who is in nowise related to you, might take the same advice with profit. If I mistake not, that young gentleman has no employment."

These words were spoken with a haughty defiance which stung old Mr. Floyd to the quick.

"Clinton Craig!" he exclaimed, angrily. "He has no need of work."

"Nor I; that is, were I gifted with an uncle who cared half as much for his own flesh and blood as he does—"

"Enough, Algernon; enough! I may have been hasty. If so, forgive me. But you know not the debt I owe to Clinton Craig. Hold! do not interrupt me and I'll explain. His mother, poor woman, became seriously involved on my account; and then she lost, yes!—sacrificed her all."

"Ah! indeed," sneered Algernon. "Yet that does not appear to me to be sufficient reason for *starving your own brother's son!*"

"Starving you! nonsense, nephew. Have I not made enough provision for you in my will? When I began life, I had not one-tenth the amount that I have bequeathed to you."

"All right, uncle; but you have made this unknown fellow, Clinton Craig, a millionaire; while I know—because you have told me—that you have left me the paltry sum of two thousand dollars! Yet, I am your blood nephew!"

"I tell you, Algernon, you must keep that subject closed. My property is my own; and, confound it! my life is nearly tormented out of me by those who fancy that I have wronged you. I have simply disposed of my property as I saw fit."

He stamped his foot impatiently.

Algernon Floyd did not reply; he simply shrugged his shoulders and gazed at the ceiling.

"Why did not your father leave you something more than the barren legacies now in my keeping?" broke in the old man, hotly, seeing that the other was so indifferent; "those legacies; that flashy portrait hanging there, a dirk-knife and an old silk cord! bah! Why did he leave such trash as this and nothing more for you?"

"To save my soul, I cannot say, sir," was the easy, impertinent answer. "I dare say my poor father gave me all that he possessed; he could do no more. Perhaps, after all," and there was a deep significance in his tones, "those legacies, apparently so barren, may in the end produce fruit—bring me an inheritance!"

He uttered these words quietly; but as he spoke them his eyes glittered upon his uncle.

"What mean you, Algernon?" and the old man looked at him keenly.

The young man pondered for a moment; then he answered:

"Why, I would dispose of those relics, with the exception of the portrait; that I value too highly to part with it. I would let the arti-

cles, with the exception mentioned, go to some curiosity-monger; I would tell him their wonderful history. He might pay me for them, that which would prove of themselves a fortune; yes, and that before I fell heir to my lordly inheritance of two thousand dollars!"

The young man spoke scornfully.

"I wish you good luck in your speculation, Algernon," said the uncle, dryly. "But I hope you are not here simply for the sake of bandying words. I wished to see you with another purpose."

"And that purpose, sir?"

"To suggest to you to change your quarters," was the reply.

The young man started violently; he bit his lip to keep back the hasty reply upon his tongue. He said not a word, but fixed his eyes inquiringly upon the old man's face as if expecting more.

"You heard me, Algernon," said Mr. Floyd, in a kinder tone; he knew that he had been unusually stern.

"I hear you, sir, and would listen further," was the quiet reply.

"Well, the fact is, Algernon, you stay out too late at nights; you bring strange company into my house, at very unseasonable hours, and—why, I do not fancy such a state of affairs."

The young man smiled scornfully as he answered:

"All of which can likewise be urged against Clinton Craig, uncle. But, sir, I listen still."

The old gentleman frowned.

"Keep Clinton Craig out of the question," he said, with some asperity. "I know his friends; but then he is—why he is my adopted son."

"And I am your nephew; that's just the difference between me and that supercilious young gentleman with the auburn curls! Bah!"

"No more of this, Algernon! I'll not be insulted by you in my own house. Listen to me, nephew," and as he spoke he drew a portfolio toward him, "I have thought it right to tell you that I think it best for you to seek lodgings elsewhere. The fact is," and his voice was unmistakably stern, "I wish you to leave my house as soon as you can. We do not get along well together, Algernon, though it is no fault of my own that—"

"Is it not, uncle? Are you sure?" interrupted the other, with a cold smile, which showed his glittering teeth, sharp and wolf-like.

"I say it was no fault of mine, Algernon; but I'll not argue the point. Here; I have drawn you a check payable to bearer for two hundred and fifty dollars. Come to me once a quarter and I will give you a similar amount. You can, if so disposed, call and see me occasionally. Take the check, use the money judiciously, try to get into some employment; be saving and thrifty, and—"

"—One day I'll be a rich man, eh, uncle? But very good, sir; I thank you from my heart, uncle."

He bent his head, and picked up the check which the old man had cast somewhat impatiently on the table. Then he moved toward the door. But he paused and looking back said, deeply:

"I suppose I may be allowed some day to return and take away my precious legacies? For the sake of my father, they are dear to me."

"Certainly, Algernon," answered the old gentleman, hastily, in a softened tone. "And, my boy, I will not hurry you; you can stay here the remainder of this week and move at your leisure."

"I shall never again sleep under this roof with you, uncle," was the quiet, firm reply.

"And, in your ear, sir; I ask no favors of you; my wants *force* me now to accept this paltry check; but henceforth and forever I would despise myself were I to accept anything at your hands. God willing, and man, we have spoken together for the last time. But—"

"What, Algernon? Do my—"

"But, sir, look for trouble; I am gifted with my father's nature; I forget not injuries from whatsoever source received, and"—in a whisper—"let Clinton Craig, the meddler, look to himself, sir!"

Old Mr. Floyd sprung to his feet and endeavored to stop the impetuous fellow; but Algernon slammed the door in his face and left the house.

The old man stood like one bereft of his senses, gazing blankly at the closed door. Slowly tottering back he sunk into his chair.

"What does he mean?" he gasped. "Is he mad? Does he threaten me? But," with a sigh of relief, "at all events, it is over now, and I breathe more freely. Ah! I feel faint!"

He arose and approached the locker to which a previous reference has been made. Having drank from the vessels contained therein, he strode several times up and down the room.

"That blessed potion! that elixir of life!" he muttered, rubbing his hands together. "How it gives me nerve and strength. Yes, I am rejoiced that Algernon has gone. But I must not forget the occurrences of last night; I will notify the police this afternoon of the dastardly attempt on my life. Yes, yes," dreamily, "I am glad that Algernon has gone!"

When the discarded nephew reached the street his swarthy face was livid with passion.

"Cast off! insulted! spurned!" he hissed, with a bitter oath. "All's well; but, old man, you only fix me in my purpose! You but hasten the terrible end! Now I must look for Jem. Farewell, proud mansion—farewell for a season; we may become acquainted again in the lowering future, and—we'll see."

He shook his clenched hand defiantly at the stately residence and turned up the street. He continued his rapid way out toward the Schuylkill, without looking back once, and without heeding at all the bleak wind that was sweeping in from the west. Turning into Twenty-first street, he soon reached Market street, crossed the long covered bridge, and took his way up the left bank of the river toward the canal locks.

That day about two o'clock a furniture wagon drove up to the Floyd mansion and took away Algernon's effects. No one asked where the young man had found lodgings, for no one cared to know.

The day wore away, and still old Thompson Floyd moved not from his library. Paper after paper he had, that day, examined, and rearranged. When old Barton, the ancient body-servant, came to summon him to dinner, Mr. Floyd put him rudely off.

Still the old merchant delved into his safe, and fished out document after document. It was nearly five o'clock when he closed the ponderous iron cover of the safe, and leaned back in his chair.

"Thank Heaven!" he murmured. "I have looked over them all again; they are all there. Will I live another five years to do the work again? But now my dear boy can, must—Ha! come in!" he suddenly exclaimed, as a rap fell on the panel.

The door opened and old Barton entered with a note.

"A man brought this, sir," he ejaculated, somewhat hastily. "He said they were waiting for you, and were in a hurry, sir."

"They! waiting! But the letter."

Mr. Floyd took the missive, opened it and read it through. His brow wrinkled into an uneasy, vexed frown.

"Always trouble! and nothing can be done without me!" he muttered. "And I don't think the water such a cold night as this—But I must go, or Miller will do nothing."

"Certainly, sir, I hope you're not going out to-night, in such bitter weather as this?" said old Barton, solicitously.

"I must, Barton; business calls me out. To the mills of course, and—But I'll not be back until to-morrow, Barton. I'll not expose myself by returning to-night. My rubbers and overcoat, Barton; then tell the man to wait."

Ten minutes later, old Thompson Floyd, thin, debilitated old man that he was, left his

door and entered the street. He cast his eyes toward the red sky, and the sun fast sinking in the west, wrapped his overcoat shiveringly around him, and, followed by a rough-looking man who was waiting for him, strode briskly up the street, taking his way toward the Schuylkill.

He had been gone only a few minutes when the bell at the mansion sounded.

Old Barton opened the door.

A short, humpbacked, coarse-looking fellow, his face almost invisible under a wide wool hat, stood there.

"Mr. Floyd left his memorandum-book on the table," he said, flashing a quick, covert glance at the old domestic. "I know the room, and I'll run up and fetch the book," and he pushed by.

Old Barton stared, but said:

"All right; up at the head of the stairs, and—why, I dare say you can find your way out."

Rubbing his chilled hands, the old servant retreated to the warm kitchen to the rear.

The man ascended the stairs. When he was once within the library, he glanced hastily about him, and gently closed the door, thus shutting out any prying eyes. Then he placed his ear to the keyhole and listened patiently for a moment. All was quiet.

Springing lightly upon a chair, the fellow took down the portrait of Lieutenant Kimcoly Floyd, quickly detached the long silken cord, placed it in his bosom, and with a common stout twine swung the portrait back into its old place on the wall.

He sprang to the floor, opened the door, and, assuming his old gait and deportment, shuffled down-stairs, and left the house, closing the front door with a noisy bang.

"I've got it!" he muttered. "Now we'll see if it has lost its charm!"

With a low, malicious chuckle, he strode rapidly away in the gathering gloom.

CHAPTER XII.

ROMANCE AND REALITY.

ON the night following the ball Clinton Craig stood on the brown-stone steps of old Charles Clayton's fine mansion on Walnut street, opposite Rittenhouse Square.

The wind was sweeping by, rude and bustling; but the young gentleman had not long to wait. The door was soon opened.

"Is Miss Clayton in?" he asked of the servant-girl, who had answered his summons.

"Yes, sir," was the reply, hesitatingly given. "But she is indisposed, and desires to see no one."

"This is a disappointment, indeed," muttered the young man, the chagrin he felt showing upon his face. "Is the young lady sick?"

"Not sick, exactly, sir, but quite fatigued. She did not reach home from the Academy ball until three o'clock this morning."

"Ah! yes," muttered Clinton.

The young man was still reluctant to go. He had had a pretty good rest, and, besides, he was burning with anxiety to see his inamorata.

"I do not like to intrude," he said, apologetically; "but will you kindly take my card to Miss Clayton, and say to her that I crave only a few moments of her time?"

The domestic bowed respectfully, and taking the card entered the house. She left the visitor in the vestibule. She had been gone only a moment when she returned.

"Walk in, sir," she said. "Miss Clayton bids me say that she will be delighted to see you."

A joyous, almost heavenly thrill flashed through Clinton Craig's bosom as he quickly entered the warm hall, and then walked into the dimly-lit elegant parlor.

"Glorious! glorious!" he murmured, as he strode up and down the luxurious apartment, in a very exhilaration of feeling. "Why am I thus destined to so much happiness? To possess the love of such a noble, resplendent being, to be allowed to bask in the sunshine of her smiles,

to dare call her *mine*, is bliss—nay, the very intoxication of bliss! But," and he paused as his brow slightly wrinkled, "would Minerva love me if I were not heir to a large fortune? What strange words she used at the Academy last night, when speaking of Algernon Floyd. And how coolly she danced with that fellow! 'Sh! nonsense; I am not jealous—at least of such as Algernon Floyd. And yet, I had forgotten!'"

As he spoke a dark shade passed over his face.

"Yes, confound it!" he resumed, in an uneasy tone, "I forgot entirely the fellow's impudent demand upon me! Can I satisfy him? Can I meet this man? Shall I expose my life to his bullet, now when happiness is within my very grasp? Can I refuse him the satisfaction which he has asked of me, *as a gentleman*? Ye gods!" and he gripped his hands fiercely. "I—ha—"

Do what he could the young man could not drive away the ominous frown from his brow as Minerva Clayton, all luxuriousness, all loveliness, all frankness and confidence, swept into the parlor.

But in the half-gloom reigning there the queenly girl noticed not the perturbed look resting on her lover's face.

"Delighted to see you, Clinton!" she exclaimed, cordially, holding out her warm, plump hand. "I have been thinking of you, darling, all the afternoon."

Clinton Craig trembled with a delicious excitement. He led her softly to a sofa, and seating himself near her clasped her hand in his and murmured, in a low, ardent voice:

"And, did you wish to see me? did you long for me to come, dearest one?"

"Can you ask such a question, Clinton?" she replied, running her jeweled fingers lightly through the young man's clustering locks.

A conversation ensued which only lovers can hypothecate and appreciate.

As all of our readers may not confess to the "soft impeachment," as many, perhaps, have gone through this "foolishness" (?), we will omit the honeyed words that passed between the two young folks.

Minutes and hours sped by. At last, the young man looked up. His eyes were glittering with excitement, his face was flushed, and his heart throbbed with an exultant joy that he did not care to conceal.

"And when shall the happy day be, darling?" he murmured. "Speak, Minerva; I await your answer."

The girl turned her head away as a blush mantled her fair cheek; but in an instant she bent her gaze frankly on the young man's face and said:

"Whenever you may decide, Clinton. I am yours even now, and ready to obey you."

"Heaven bless you, Minerva! I'll never profane your love. Now what say you to one week from to-night?"

Again Minerva turned her head away; but as before it was only for a moment.

She faced him again; but she did not lift her head as she replied:

"Tis soon, very soon, Clinton; and papa? You know he must be consulted; I'm satisfied that he will not object. Say two weeks from to-night, and my hand shall be yours, as my heart already is."

"It shall be as you wish, darling; and—"

Just then the bell rung, clamorously.

"Who can it be?" murmured Minerva.

"Tis very late," and she glanced at the clock.

Then a rap sounded on the parlor-door, and a servant entered the room with a letter in her hand.

"A man brought this for you, Mr. Craig," she said. "He wishes you to attend to its contents at once."

With some misgiving, Clinton took the letter, and, excusing himself to Minerva, drew near the hall gaslight which was burning brightly. Tearing open the envelope he hurriedly read the letter through. Before he had perused a dozen words his brow contracted and his cheek reddened. When he had finished he

crushed the sheet rudely into his pocket and re-entered the parlor.

"I must go, Minerva," he said, hurriedly. "Yet, it is certainly time that I should," he continued, with an attempt at a smile as he glanced toward the handsome clock. "Truth is, I am wanted at home."

"Who wants you, Clinton?" asked the girl, eying him keenly, for she had noted his every movement since the reception of the letter; and she had marked with some foreboding his evidently perturbed manner.

"Why," hesitatingly, "Dr. Ashe, darling. He wishes to see me on some business of importance, he says."

"I don't like Dr. Ashe!" said the girl, bluntly.

"You do not know him well enough, Minerva; he is a fine fellow, though somewhat whimsical. I dare say his business is to sit up with me until two o'clock in the morning and smoke my cigars."

"If that is all, Clinton, send him word that you are engaged, and that you will see him tomorrow," suggested the young lady.

Young Craig colored.

"No, Minerva," he answered, "I must go. Fred means *business*, or he would not have sent for me at this hour. I must say good-night, darling."

He leaned over her and pressed a warm, passionate kiss upon the willing lips that were held up to his.

"Was ever man so accursed?" he muttered to himself a few moments afterward, as he was hurrying along the cold, wind-blown street.

But he did not go toward the office of Dr. Ashe. He crossed Broad street, and, reaching Spruce, hastened on. Fifteen minutes afterward he entered his adopted father's residence, just as the bell on Independence Hall pealed out the hour of midnight.

CHAPTER XIII.

ABROAD ON THE RIVER.

ABOUT four o'clock in the afternoon of this same day the figure of a tall man suddenly emerged from the shadow of Girard avenue bridge and stood for a moment in the sunshine. He glanced hastily around him and peered up, guardedly, at the embankment and the bridge. No one was in sight; a rumbling country-wagon jolting along the frozen road had just passed over the river. The wind was blowing too raw and bitter this cold December afternoon for pleasure-seekers to be abroad. However inviting and enticing the scenery when the "warm south" was sweeping over the land it was far different now when grim winter held his court, sent forth his blinding snows and trooping winds, and froze the running rills and babbling brooks.

The man cautiously climbed the rugged hill by the bridge. Then he paused and peered once again around him. Still no one was in sight. Hastily descending to his former position, he approached the edge of the stream, and drew a coil of cord from his pocket. To the end of the line was attached a heavy leaden weight. Glancing about him for the last time, he swung the weighted cord over his head and cast it out into the dark current.

"Not deep enough!" he muttered, in a vexed tone, as he drew in the line. "Yet this must and shall be the place; for it suits! I'll try again."

Whirling the lead once more around his head he let fly.

The line spun far out, and the weight fell with a peculiar *gluck* into the water.

Still he shook his head as for the third time he cast the line, and marked the depth of the water on the soggy cord. At last he succeeded in throwing the lead nearly to the first pier, the line running rapidly through his hands until the bottom was reached. He had found deep water.

A grim smile of satisfaction spread over the man's face, as, noting the spot with his eye, by the distance from the shore, from the pier, and

by a particular line with the bridge above, he slowly coiled in the cord.

"I've found the place!" he ejaculated, hauling in the slack. "It will do. But, by Jove! so soon!" he muttered, in an anxious tone, as, drawing the string through his fingers, half-formed ice fell at his feet. "The river is freezing! It will be frozen hard before day. Will that be good or bad for me? But I must hurry; we must meet him. The sun will soon be down, and—yes; it will be almost dark by five o'clock. Glorious!" he continued, in an excited voice, as, turning away from the river, he hurried on toward the old house—Bloody Moll's—which we have before mentioned. "I've stern work on hand to-night; ay! and so has—my friend!"

In ten minutes, having crept successfully around the jutting cliff—no mean feat—he cautiously drew near the house. The door was shut, and, with one exception, the windows were closed. But the fellow rapped boldly. No response. Again he knocked. Again, no response. The man cast an anxious gaze toward the fast setting sun.

A coarse face, one evidently disguised with daubs of paint and false beard, was that upon which the slanting sunbeams fell. It was a face, however, keenly alive to passing events, as the roving black eyes, flashing around, indicated.

With a muttered curse, he kicked the door heavily. In answer to this imperative summons the bolt suddenly turned, and Mother Moll peered out.

"Ah!" she muttered, in a low, satisfied tone. "So it is you, my dear—"

"Sh! sh! Moll; no names! I am on business; and—why, of course, you don't know me, never laid eyes on me before, eh?"

"Of course, my friend; you and your business are safe with me. Come in; the wind is cold and piercing."

The man hesitated.

"No, Moll," he answered. "Time is precious; I've none of it to spare. But have you any company?"

"No. I have had but one visitor to-day. He has gone out for *prog*—Black Ben."

As she spoke she eyed the fellow closely.

That person visibly started; but quickly recovering himself, he said:

"Black Ben is not to be trusted, Moll; he is given to tricks and treachery."

"Ah! Stranger! He says the same of—others!" was the woman's reply. "But," she continued, as if getting impatient and anxious to terminate this conference in the cold air, "how can I serve you?"

"I want the skiff, Moll."

"The skiff? Why the river is freezing now, and—"

"Confound the freezing!" interrupted the man, rudely. "Did I say anything about that? I want the skiff; I'll pay well for it, and in advance. But, hark ye, Moll, I have not been here to-day and I will not borrow the skiff, eh?"

"Exactly. You shall have the skiff. But what's the game?"

"Canalers are still about; you are forgetful, Moll!"

"Precious few they are, my friend," was the woman's quick reply. "Yes; and they are well housed. But the skiff is yours—three dollars in advance, the price," she hastened to say in a business-like way.

"Good! here are six dollars, Moll," answered the man, promptly, as he felt in his pocket and handed out the money in silver quarters.

"You are liberal, my friend; you are flush," said Moll, suspiciously.

"I am that way occasionally; but the skiff, Moll; I am in a hurry. I tell you I am full of work to-night."

"Glad to hear it, and hope you'll be paid well. But, how many oars?"

The man hesitated for a moment. Then he answered:

"Two pairs, Moll, of course; for the current is strong, you know, and ice is already making."

"Do you wish the *shot*?" asked the woman, in a whisper.

"Shot! Nonsense, Moll. Nothing of that sort, old girl," and the speaker laughed grimly.

"Well, the skiff is under the shed. Two pairs of oars are in it."

"Good. I'll have everything back before daybreak, ice or no ice. Good-night."

"Good-night," and the woman closed the door and disappeared.

The man at once drew the light skiff from under the shed, and springing lightly in, shoved it off. The light craft soon felt the rushing current, and guided by the man who sat in the stern sheets, it shot rapidly down the stream. As soon, however, as the old woman's house was hid behind the beetling rock, the man grasped an oar, and, using it as an oar, sent the boat, with a few vigorous strokes, driving ashore under an overhanging clump of dead bushes. He sprung out and searching around soon found and flung into the skiff a bag, tied around one end with a stout cord.

Once aboard again, the fellow shoved off, and taking the oars rowed rapidly downstream toward the dam.

CHAPTER XIV.

CLINTON CRAIG'S COMPANY.

THE letter which had hastened Clinton Craig's departure from Minerva Clayton's presence, was quite brief, though urgent, and imperative in tone. It ran thus:

"DEAR C.:

"I know where you are. I take the liberty to send John, and bid you herewith, to come home at once. Trouble is brewing, and you are wanted. I am in your room; and you have company waiting for you. Hang it! I have been here two hours! Don't be wasting the night in—*folly*, to say the least, when serious matters demand your attention. Come at once, and, from his unpleasant position, relieve,

"Yours sincerely, FRED."

When Clinton reached home, and entered, he stood for a moment in the hall, as though he was undecided. The young fellow felt that some great trouble was impending, that some ominous cloud was stretching over the horizon, and casting a black, impenetrable shadow at his feet.

But banishing his dark thoughts, he threw aside his hat and overcoat, and ascending the stairs lightly—for the hour was late—he turned to the left and entered his room.

Fred Ashe was seated near the grate. He was quietly smoking a cigar, and gazing vacantly at the red coals. But a serious shade rested upon the doctor's face, and the expression of his eyes was anxious and foreboding. Was he thinking of Alice Ray, lost to him? Was he thinking of Alice Ray, probably lost to the world? Or, was he thinking of troubles in which his bosom friend was involved?

But as Clinton entered the room, Fred turned to a man who sat near the table, and said:

"I am happy to inform you, sir, that this is Mr. Craig."

The man arose and bowing half-respectfully, half-carelessly, said in a tone that was quite steady and composed:

"Excuse me for presuming to await your coming, sir. Time was an object with me, and I could not postpone the occasion of my visit—an unpleasant one, sir, but one which I have not hesitated to perform. I have the honor to hand you this communication."

He held out an unsealed envelope to the young man.

"Be seated, sir, and excuse me for a moment," said young Craig, politely, at the same time receiving and opening the missive. He read it through carefully. Then, without moving his head, he glanced over the top of the sheet at the man who had brought it. His scrutiny was but momentary.

The man was a short, heavily-built fellow. True enough he was clad as a gentleman; but he did not bear about him the breeding of one.

"I suppose, sir, you are acquainted with the contents—with the tone of this communication?" asked Clinton, glancing again at his strange company.

"I am," was the prompt reply. "I now await your answer, sir."

This was business-like and to the point.

"Can you oblige me by returning to-morrow when I will be better prepared to reply to this note? I need a few hours to deliberate on the matter."

"I was under the impression, sir, that you had been informed of this expected call. If I mistake not, such was the information I received from my friend."

The man spoke very coolly.

Clinton Craig winced; and his cheeks slightly reddened. In his mad joy, and his love-blindness for Minerva Clayton, the young man had, indeed, forgotten almost everything. He certainly had forgotten his note that morning requesting his friend, Fred Ashe, to call in the evening.

But he aroused himself, and asked:

"Are you aware, sir, of the relations existing between Algernon Floyd and myself?"

"If rumor speaks truly, I am aware, sir, that no *real* relationship exists between you—Mr. Floyd," and he made a spiteful emphasis, "*blood-nephew* to your *adopted* father. Certainly that relationship should not be a bar to a meeting between gentlemen."

Again young Craig's face flushed; and this time he bit his lip angrily.

"There is *no* relationship, sir, which can make one backward in such a matter as this," he answered, tartly. "Excuse me while I have five minutes' private conversation with my friend here."

"Certainly," and the man turned coolly to a book of photographs, while Clinton, beckoning Dr. Ashe to follow him, withdrew to an adjoining room.

"A confounded bad matter, Fred, and what am I to do?" exclaimed the young man, as soon as they were out of earshot. "Ay, and all this right under my adopted father's nose!"

"Don't disturb yourself about that, Clinton," returned the doctor. "Mr. Floyd is absent from home to-night."

"Absent? And where is he?" asked the young man in surprise.

"When I came here this evening, old Barton told me that your father had been suddenly summoned to Manayunk. I believe one of the mills had stopped, and the foreman wanted the old gentleman to come out and look at it. He will return to-morrow—or, rather, to-day; for 'tis now half-past twelve o'clock."

"A raw night for the good old man; and he so delicate and frail. But Fred, this business with Algernon Floyd is a troublesome matter. Yesterday morning I would have welcomed such a message from him; but now," and he sighed, "it gives me annoyance."

"Exactly; I suppose it's on account of your relations to Minerva Clayton? Do not be offended at my frankness, Clinton; I am your friend."

"I am not offended, Fred; and it is on Minerva's account that I am disinclined to meet this fellow. We are engaged, Fred; we will be married two weeks from to-night."

The young physician started back.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Then, my friend, it is, indeed, too late to warn you of that woman—of Minerva Clayton!"

"Warn me, Fred! Speak not of Miss Clayton in such terms; she is my affianced."

Fred Ashe made no reply; he simply bowed his head and kept his eyes fastened upon the floor. Suddenly, however, he looked up and said, decidedly:

"Whatever may be your relations and your engagements, Clinton, you are still classed among gentlemen; as such you are accountable. I know the contents of that note, the fellow who brought it took commendable pains to enlighten me on the subject. Moreover, he volunteered this statement, that in case you rejected the invitation to mortal combat, Algernon Floyd would post you in the clubs as a puppy and a coward, and would seek a street encounter with you."

"The contemptible scoundrel!" and Clinton Craig's eyes flashed venomously. "This deter-

mines me, Fred; I'll meet the fellow, and my aim shall not fail me!"

"Truth is, Clinton, you could not do otherwise—I wish that you could," said the physician. "But, appreciating the position in which I already feared that you were placed, I offered this fellow myself as your substitute either in a rencontre with him or with his principal."

"Noble Fred! But you shall run no such risk for me. Come what may, I will give Algernon Floyd satisfaction."

So saying, accompanied by his friend, he re-entered the room wherein he had left the bearer of the challenge.

"I accept this letter—the invitation which it contains, sir," he said, quietly; "and I refer you to my friend here, Dr. Ashe."

"Thanks for your promptness, sir. I suppose, doctor," turning to the young physician, "as time is precious, and as I think it is the desire of all parties to have this affair settled as soon as possible, we might as well make our brief arrangements here?"

"At your service," responded the doctor, coldly, and not even consulting Clinton.

The two drew their chairs close together and at once entered into a low conversation. Young Craig stood all the time at the further side of the room, his head bowed upon his bosom.

The conference between the seconds lasted for some time. At length they arose.

"Thank you, doctor; it is arranged to my entire satisfaction. And may I ask," he continued, "that, in view of the fact that we wish the matter to be as quiet as possible, you will extend surgical aid in case my friend is wounded?"

"In that event I am, most assuredly, at his service," was the ready reply.

"Thanks, sir; and I have the honor to bid you good-night, gentlemen."

He bowed and left the room. Dr. Ashe accompanied him to the street-door, and returned in a few moments.

"You must go to bed, Clinton—and to sleep, too," he said, positively. "You need rest; for your hand must be steady in the morning."

The physician spoke gravely.

"In the morning! Ha! so soon?"

"Yes; and the sooner the better; but come, Clinton; under such circumstances as this, it is both customary and necessary to make arrangements of one's affairs—in case—why, of accident, you know. You meet to-morrow morning at half-past eight o'clock; the place, back of Lemon Hill; and weapons, dueling-pistols; the distance, ten paces."

A conference, lasting an hour, took place between the two friends. When it ended Clinton Craig, sad and gloomy, arose and said, with deep emotion:

"Heaven bless you, Fred! and Heaven stand by me in this encounter—for Minerva's sake!" and he went from the room.

Dr. Ashe remained with his friend that night.

Early next morning, as the sun was rising over the cold, clear-rimmed horizon, a couple of carriages drew up from different directions on Girard avenue—at that time almost a country road—to the rear of Lemon Hill. The exact spot was where at this day stand the remains of the earth-breastwork thrown up during the recent civil war.

From each of these two carriages descended two gentlemen. They hastily took their way over the little hill, through the frozen snow, until they had reached a small level plateau. No time was lost with the preliminary arrangements; and after a little sharp wrangling between the seconds, in which Dr. Ashe carried his point, the principals took their places. They saluted coldly.

"Does the challenger insist on going on with this duel?" asked Dr. Ashe, after a moment's pause.

"He does!" was the prompt reply, from Algernon Floyd himself.

"So be it!" returned the doctor; and, passing near his principal, he whispered:

"Be firm, my friend! and watch him!"

He strode on and withdrew to a safe distance.

The giving of the word, and the dropping of the handkerchief had fallen by lot to Floyd's second. Taking his place, the fellow said, in a low, but distinct voice:

"Are you ready, gentlemen?"

"Ready!" returned both of the men, who stood, with the deadly weapons in hand, facing one another.

"Then fire at the word *three*. Again; are you ready?"

"Ready!" was the simultaneous response.

"Then; *one—two!*"

Before the word *three* was reached there came a flash, and a report.

One of the principals staggered backward and sunk into the pallid snow.

CHAPTER XV.

LIFE AND DEATH.

WE must go back somewhat in the story we are telling.

Dr. Ashe entered the room of the sufferer on tip-toe. He paused for a moment to see his way more clearly, as the room was darkened and his eyes were blinded by the dazzling snow without. Slowly he drew near the bed; he walked as though his feet were shod with down. Again he paused, his breath coming and going rapidly, his heart pulsing wildly. The young man trembled with excitement, anxiety and dread. At last he stood by the bedside and bent over it.

Long-drawn, labored breathing fell upon his ear; low, muttered words of delirium, meaningless in import, disconnected and empty, broke the dreary silence of the room.

The physician gently took the small, burning hand in his, and slid his sensitive finger over the bounding artery. He did not start; he quietly let go the feverish hand, and shook his head sadly, discouragingly. He laid his fingers on the invalid's forehead, felt the arteries throbbing over the temple, and smoothed back the clustering masses of wavy gold that beclouded the face.

"Worse! worse!" he muttered, half-aloud—"much worse! ay! dangerous!"

The girl turned restlessly.

"Who spoke? who spoke?" she murmured.

"I am listening. Was it you, Clinton? or you, Minerva Clayton? Oh! Minerva! Minerva Clayton, you have stolen my darling from me! You—you—"

Her voice died away as the poor girl turned wearily on her pillow.

And still Doctor Ashe stood there, alone, by the bedside of the sufferer—alone in *her* room! And the young man's bosom heaved; and as the sad, weary sigh forced itself from the bosom of the unconscious girl, a tear stood in the strong man's big brown eye; and he turned aside to let that tear-drop fall unmarked, unheeded.

Again, in a sweet, plaintive undertone, the girl murmured:

"Oh, Heaven, how I loved him! loved him purely, trustingly! And I thought so fondly, so *foolishly*, that he loved me! Alas! that I was so rudely awakened to the terrible truth. But it was *she* who stole him from me—the siren with the raven locks, the glittering eyes, the beauteous form! And Clinton has buried me! buried me in a grave of woe and misery. Yet, I murmur not; for I am going—going far beyond the rosy clouds—far beyond the shining river! going there to *rest*."

Again her mutterings died away, and again she turned languidly upon the bed. She scarcely seemed to breathe, though the marble-like bosom was heaving tumultuously beneath the snowy linen.

Again the young physician stole his finger over the bounding, irregular pulse. This time he started violently.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "She is worse! all the time worse! Something must be done at once. Be steady, my reeling brain! Stand by me now, and may God's unerring finger point to the saving remedy."

He hurried out into the silent hall.

"How is she, doctor? Speak! You tarried long!" and the father's voice trembled with fear and anxiety.

"Come, Mr. Ray; follow me to the parlor," was the reply which the physician made, as he led the way himself down-stairs to the apartment designated.

The old man followed.

Once in the parlor, Fred Ashe, now self-possessed and self-reliant, turned and said seriously, but frankly:

"Your daughter is worse, Mr. Ray."

"Much worse, doctor? dangerous?"

"Much worse, and dangerously ill," was the soft reply.

"Oh, Heaven! spare my child!" groaned the poor father. "She is my all! Take *me* instead, but spare her!"

Up and down the room strode Dr. Ashe, paying no heed to the distracted old man, who was watching his every movement. Suddenly the young man paused.

"Did the nurse administer the medicine as I directed, Mr. Ray?"

"Punctually, sir."

"Was the ice applied to the head as ordered?"

"I attended to that myself, doctor."

Again the physician, his eyes bent upon the floor, strode meditatively up and down the room. Again he paused.

"Think not hard of me, Mr. Ray," he said, in a low, distressed tone; "nor think that I am callous and cruel when I speak very plainly to you."

"Say on, doctor; with God's help, I am prepared to listen."

"Yes, sir; unless there is a change in your daughter within six or eight hours, she *cannot* recover."

"Cannot recover! Oh, Heaven, stand—"

"Listen, my dear friend," interrupted the physician, speaking slowly and calmly. "I'll do as much for Alice as mortal man can do. I'll try a remedy—will stay and administer it myself—which seldom fails. Should it fail, there is yet one resource left—only one, and that, fraught with danger—one to be resorted to only when all other hope is gone! Should it succeed, life is saved; should it fail, death will be hastened. It is a remedy to be approached with fear and dread. Yet, should it be necessary, I will not shrink from it."

He stopped.

"I am listening, doctor; I place implicit confidence in you."

"Your daughter's brain, Mr. Ray, is filled with torrents of hot, burning blood; that brain is, almost literally, being consumed. Should the brain-structure itself break down, the disastrous end could not be delayed a single moment. Now in a word: should the remedy, which I purpose to administer forthwith, fail to effect a radical change for the better, by eight o'clock this evening I shall cut both of the temporal arteries."

"What!"

"And now the danger," pursued the physician, not noticing the interruption: "should I have miscalculated my patient's strength—and I am free to say there are no reliable data for determining it—she will die in the twinkling of an eye! If on the other hand she can spare four, nay two ounces of blood, she'll be saved as certainly as the sun shines in the heavens!"

He spoke positively.

"Again, doctor, I trust you implicitly!" wailed the poor father.

The physician bowed, dashed off a few penciled lines on a slip of paper, and dispatched it to the neighboring drug-store.

Five—ten—minutes elapsed when the messenger returned with the vial containing the medicine ordered. Dr. Ashe took it himself, ascended the stair at a bound and again entered the sick chamber.

And there, with the vial in his hand, his finger upon the pulse, sat Fred Ashe, watching every flickering thrill that sped through the arteries, watching every changing expression that flitted over the saintly face of the sufferer. There he sat as the time dragged wearily by; still, as yet, there came no change

in the telltale pulse, save for the worse; and still the dark shade of anxiety sat on the physician's face.

The battle was terrible; but it seemed now that remedies were unavailing, that Science was powerless.

The shades of night some time before had fallen over the great city, and eight o'clock was almost on the minute.

Dr. Ashe slowly arose. He placed the vial, emptied of its impotent contents, on the bureau. He felt in his vest-pocket. He took out a lancet and flashed its bright, clean blade in the gaslight.

"A bowl," he said to the old father.

The nurse arose and brought it.

"The time has come, Mr. Ray. This," holding up the keen-edged lancet, "*is all that is left*. Do you trust me, yet?"

A moment of agony, and the old man bowed his head.

"Life or death, I trust you, doctor!" was all that he said.

Quietly, calmly the physician felt for the bounding artery, thrilling along the temple. He found it. Then like a man of iron Fred Ashe gripped the glittering steel. Then he flashed it unflinchingly down.

The unerring lancet reached its mark; the bright red blood spun out in a jerking jet. Then the physician's finger sought the wrist again.

Ye heavens! the glad, bright smile that swept over the young doctor's face.

He placed his finger on the jetting wound, checked the blood, and bowed his head.

"Where am I? What is this? Oh! papa! oh! doctor!" broke from the girl, as she opened her eyes and glanced consciously around her.

"She is saved! Heaven be praised!" murmured Fred Ashe, bowing his fine head until his brow rested upon the snowy coverlet.

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER DARK.

It was a hard pull that black winter night against the rushing current of the Schuylkill. It is true that the two men who bent to the ashen oars were brawny and stalwart; and the boat was light. But the rush of the waters was tremendous; and the thin coating of ice increasing every moment as the night deepened made the task of urging the boat onward no easy one. At last, by a vigorous effort, the rowers shot the light craft ahead, and turning the bow inshore, dashed hard up on the pebbly shore.

"By Jove! hard work this!" ejaculated the man who pulled the stroke oar. "Though the distance is almost nothing, it is hard to make. We'll rest a spell, and try it again."

"Right enough," answered the other. "Yet we must hurry; I *must* be in time to-night, you know."

"I know it, and I, of all men, would be the last to forget your errand. So come; let's go for—Ha! 'sh! quiet! What's that?"

"What's what?" queried the other, looking around in the direction indicated.

"Why, yonder is something. See that dark object there by the bush; and I'd almost swear that I heard the splash of an oar."

"Yes? But that dark object is the bush itself; and the splash was the echo under the bridge here of this infernal current dashing amid the rocks; that's all."

This seemed to satisfy the other.

"Then shove her off and let fall," he said.

"We must get the skiff housed; then we—Well, we'll have work enough to-night to let us rest for a month. Ay!"

The remainder of the sentence was drowned in the roar of the current breaking against the bow of the skiff, which had now been forced out into the stream.

Slowly the oarsmen forced the boat onward. At last they rounded the tall, jutting rock, and the water which they now had reached, being an eddy, was smoother. In five minutes more they reached the old house on the brink of the river. Hauling the boat ashore, they secured it under the shed. Then they left the place.

Twenty minutes later, the dark object, which had been noticed by one of the rowers, suddenly assumed motion. It was a skiff; and the single person who sat in it was a large, masculine woman. Dextrously she used an oar as a paddle, and hugging the shore, urged the boat rapidly ahead. She apparently knew every inch of her way—every current and every eddy. She, in due time, successfully rounded the large rock.

"Aha!" she muttered, grimly, as her boat glided along toward the old house on the bank. "I have seen strange sights in my time!—sights to make the chicken-hearted faint. And I, also—But who can keep a secret better than I? Ay! and who can make a secret *pay better than I?* Well we'll see if *some* secrets can't be *made to bring in gold!* It's more than likely. Ha! ha!" and her mocking laugh rung out in the quiet, desolate scene. "Deceive me! Bah! I never—"

At that moment a sudden flash spitted out from the darkness ahead, and a sharp report awoke the echoes, while a whizzing bullet hurtled by.

The woman dropped at once to the bottom of the boat; though she was not touched by the deadly messenger.

Instantly flying feet, spurning the frozen snow on shore, were heard.

For five minutes the woman allowed the boat to drift away. But, at last, she stealthily raised herself, and easing the oar noiselessly into the water, once more urged the skiff ahead. She opened not her lips until she sprang ashore. Seizing the painter, she hauled in the boat unaided and alone, as if it were a feather, and secured it alongside the other already there.

"You missed your aim, cowardly rascal!" she then muttered. "And now, for that trick, there is a score betwixt us. Time will tell how it'll be settled. I know the ring of that pistol; and I know the man that pulled the trigger! Let him look to himself; ay! and tomorrow the river will be closed—frozen! Well, well, it is uncommon handy to have *two* skiffs!"

Muttering thus, old Moll turned to the door, and, after giving one glance out over the dim, gray waters, entered the house.

The next day—the one on which the duel was fought back of Lemon Hill, the one on which Dr. Ashe battled so nobly, as an ally of life against death—the yellow Schuylkill was frozen over, hard and tight.

Imbedded in the hard ice-crust, down near the Fairmount dam, was a gentleman's hat.

CHAPTER XVII.

MISSING.

CLINTON CRAIG sat in his room, sad and anxious. His left arm was supported in a sling, and his face was pale and wan. Every movement gave him pain, and caused him to lean back, faint and exhausted. His shoulders were covered with a loose smoking jacket. On the table lay a letter which he had just managed, with some effort, to write; it was directed to Minerva Clayton, and it informed the girl that he had met with a somewhat painful accident which prevented him from coming to see her.

The accident affair was of course a fabrication; but Dr. Ashe had, for sake of quiet, recommended this fib.

Algernon Floyd's pistol-ball was the accident; and it came near ending Clinton Craig's life itself.

On the mantle in the room were several roller bandages, a sling or so, a bottle of cooling lotion, and various surgical appliances which denoted the attention of Dr. Ashe. Yet, for a whole day and night, and part of another day, the young physician had not been near his friend. He was with another patient—the reader knows whom.

"Hang it!" muttered young Craig. "I wish Fred would come, if he intends coming at all! Here, John!" he exclaimed, as the serving boy passed in the hall; "run up to the doctor's and ask him to come and see me. Tell him that

my shoulder pains me terribly. And, a moment, John; has father returned from the mills?"

"Not yet, sir; and Barton is very uneasy about him, sir, and says he is going out to Manayunk this afternoon to see about him."

"Ah! yes; Barton had better go. Away so long! and—But, John, away with you, and hurry back."

"Yes, sir," and the boy left.

"Tis very strange that the old gentleman tarries long away," resumed Clinton, in an uneasy tone, as the door closed. "I am uneasy about him. The weather was severe; he may be sick from exposure to it. Heaven grant that—"

Just then a modest rap sounded on the door, and old Barton, the body-servant, put his head into the room.

"Called by to ask, sir, how's your arm?" said the old man, respectfully. "Powerful unlucky accident," he continued, as he entered the apartment.

"Yes, Barton; thank you. The arm is no better; far from it. As you say, it was an ugly affair—accident."

For a moment the aged domestic was silent; but there was a speaking seriousness in his face as he moved softly around by the grate.

Clinton noticed the expression.

"Well, Barton, any news of father?" he asked.

"That's just it," answered Barton, quickly.

"I've known your father for thirty years, sir; but I never knew him to be so—I must say it, sir—so foolish as to go out in such weather as we had night before last—and upon the river, too."

"Upon the river! How—what do you mean?"

"Why, sir, he said something to me as he was leaving the door, to the effect that Mr. Miller had sent to Columbia bridge for him in a carriage, but that owing to roughness of the river road he was to take a boat at Fairmount to the bridge."

"Yes. But he was well wrapped up?"

"Certainly, sir. But the wind blowed powerful hard, and that stretch on the river, sir! I'm afraid the old gentleman is laid up with the pleurisy or rheumatiz. But I'll go right away and look after him; I can't wait until the afternoon."

A pause ensued; but Barton did not leave the room.

Clinton Craig bent his eyes moodily on the floor. He was thinking.

"Yes, Barton; suppose you go now?" he said at length, looking up. "And—yes—hitch Davy to my trotting-wagon and drive out. He can take you there in twenty minutes if you give him his head. I, too, am very uneasy about father. But, one moment, Barton: has Algernon Floyd indeed left the house?"

"He hasn't been here for two days, sir. He and the old gentleman had it hot and heavy; and so, Mr. Algernon has quit. He has taken his things away too—even down to the old red silk cord that was to his father's portrait; but he left the picture in the library."

"Very good. Now hurry, Barton; and as the weather is cold you may push Davy."

"Yes, sir," and the old domestic left the room at once.

Clinton leaned his head upon his hand and pondered. He did not like the look of affairs; the continued absence of Mr. Floyd was puzzling, and there came over him a vague fear of impending trouble. But he shook this off as he heard a step on the stair. In a moment the boy, John, entered the room.

"Doctor was in a big hurry, sir," he said.

"But he sent this, sir," and he handed a note to the young man.

Clinton opened it, clumsily, spread out the sheet as well as he could, and read this:

"DEAR CLINT:

"Don't be uneasy. I am responsible for your shoulder. You must put up with some pain, my boy. No man ever born has gone through the world without more or less of it. But, I thank heaven, Clint, that Alice Ray is out of danger, and that she is rapidly convalescing. The battle was a rough one, but,

with God's blessing, science won it. Clinton, my boy, there are some strange rumors abroad in the city in which you are concerned. Do not be startled. I am going now to search into these rumors, and you may expect me early this evening to bring you the result. Till then excuse me.

"Yours ever,
"FRED."

Slowly the young man refolded the note, placed it in his desk, and casting the letter for Minerva Clayton to the boy, bade him post it.

The day wore wearily away to Clinton Craig. His arm pained him much; and he was feverish and restless from excitement.

But the weary hours did drag themselves away; darkness settled over the city, and the lamps in the streets were lighted. But Fred Ashe had not come; nor had old Barton as yet returned.

Just as seven o'clock was striking, confused noises and voices were heard at the street door of the Floyd mansion; then the tramping, as of a crowd of men, echoed distinctly. Then the door of the mansion was opened, and the hallway in a moment was filled with a turbulent throng.

Clinton Craig sprung to his feet, and hurrying to the balusters looked down in amazement and half in awe. The passage was filled with policemen, who were putting out those officious ones that had endeavored to force their way behind them. The officers finally succeeded, and placed two of their number to guard the door.

Scarcely crediting his senses, Clinton ran to a front window of his room and gazed out.

The street was filled with a motley crowd of men and boys; and the air was discordant with their clamorous uproar.

Wondering, and fearing what he could not define, the young man hurried again to the head of the stairs and looked down. Among the policemen, Clinton saw a small boy, with a pair of skates slung over his shoulder. He also saw Mr. Miller, the superintendent of the Floyd factories, old Barton, and his bosom friend, Dr. Fred Ashe. The whole party were holding an excited conference. This was terminated suddenly by Dr. Ashe, who exclaimed in a loud, indignant tone to the officer who seemed to be in charge of the squad:

"I scorn your insinuation, sir! I do not bar the ways of justice; but I do enter a solemn protest against any such procedure as this."

"We do not doubt your honesty of motive, doctor," returned the sergeant, firmly though respectfully; "but, in a word, sir, suspicions point to Mr. Craig. We know, already, that he was brought home, early yesterday morning, from the neighborhood of the Park; we also know that he was wounded. We must find out the nature of that wound, and the manner in which he received it. Without more words, sir, allow us, peaceably, to do our duty."

So saying, the sergeant pushed by and beckoning two of the policeman to follow him, ascended the stairs and entered Clinton Craig's room.

"Are you Mr. Clinton Craig?" asked the officer at once.

"I am," was the prompt reply. "Now, what—"

"Then I arrest you, sir, in the name of the Commonwealth."

"Arrest me? Mind you, my man! Arrest me! and for what?"

"For the murder of Thompson Floyd," was the reply.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ENEMY'S TESTIMONY.

On the day after the fearful struggle for the mastery Alice Ray was able to sit up in bed. She could converse rationally and without fatigue.

On the next day, when the doctor had returned to see her, a glad light lit up his fine eyes, as he marked the wondrous change for the better in his patient. And Alice bent on the young man a beaming look of gratitude and confidence.

But then a slight cloud spread over the physician's face. He was thinking that the victory which he had won was barren of fruit to him; he knew that Alice Ray could never be his wife; he knew, too, that his sad heart would ever be mateless, now. And then another terrible battle began in the young man's bosom—that battle was waged to win a victory over himself. Yet though we endeavor to faithfully chronicle events, we cannot record how that struggle ended.

In due and speedy time Alice recovered, and, though for a time her face was pinched and sallow, and her eye dim and lusterless, yet, the roses bloomed soon again in the faded cheeks, and light and hope glanced from those dove-like orbs of skyey blue. Whether or not her heart was happy we cannot say; but, in speedy time, Alice Ray, in all that marks a gentle, lovely maiden, was herself again.

We will not attempt to describe the sensation created in the city by the absence of Mr. Floyd. Rumor spread on rumor and by evening there were a hundred startling reports afloat. One had it that the old man had been murdered in Fairmount Park, and another that he had been overcome by cold, had frozen to death by the mill-houses, and that the stormy winds had blown his hat into the congealing water. Another rumor had it that his hacked and mutilated body had been found near Girard avenue bridge, and so on, and so on.

None of these reports were true, so far as proof was concerned.

Officers were soon at work, quietly, yet searchingly; but no clew had been discovered leading to the clearing up of the mystery.

These flying reports reached Minerva Clayton's ears in due time. The proud girl's eyes flashed almost with exultation as she heard the startling tidings. She was even then glorying in the happy thought she would soon be the wife of a handsome and wealthy young gentleman.

Later in the day another terrible, mysterious report got wind. It was wafted quickly abroad, rushing like the storm itself. That report was that old Thompson Floyd had been murdered and flung into the Schuylkill, and that the murderer was—CLINTON CRAIG!

This report, even more startling than the others, likewise reached Minerva, the bank-president's daughter. And, strange to say, the maiden did not evince much emotion. There was a sudden, perceptible start in her, a rapid paling of the peachy cheeks, a frightened, tremulous expression about the eyes. But there speedily came a calm, which was as unnatural as it was sudden. Then she seated herself, while a serious shade gradually spread over her face, and fell to musing. An hour passed.

When the girl at last arose there was an unmistakable smile of satisfaction, of a well-won triumph, on her lovely face; and she murmured, softly:

"Well, well! it matters not to me! In either case, I'll gain my point; for I must—nay! I already have won!"

We will return to Clinton Craig's room on this eventful night when he had been arrested for the murder of his adopted father.

As those fatal words: "For the murder of Thompson Floyd!" fell from the officer's lips, Clinton staggered back, and, clutching feebly at the door-facing, murmured, in a tone of agony:

"Murdered! murdered! Oh, Heaven! no!"

"Bear up, Clinton! be a man. This is false; and I'll stand by you!"

"I'm sorry to perform so sad a duty, Mr. Craig," said the sergeant as the doctor ceased. "But I must take you before an alderman, and now. Whatever you or your friend may have to say please defer until then. I must search this room, and this house, before I leave."

"Do your duty, officer; I'll not hinder you," answered Clinton, who had now recovered his composure, leaning, pale but determined, on the arm of Dr. Ashe.

Leaving a policeman in the room, the sergeant, bidding old Barton to follow him, en-

tered the library and searched it thoroughly. Every drawer that was unlocked was inspected; likewise the bookcase, the tables and all the furniture.

"Do you miss anything from this room, my man?" asked the sergeant, as he paused after finishing the work of search.

"Only one article, sir; a pocket-pistol which Mr. Floyd always kept in that drawer, there."

The officer noted this.

"Anything else? Are you sure?" he asked, looking up from his memorandum-book.

Old Barton hesitated. Then he said:

"Nothing else, sir, except an old silk cord that used to hold that picture up," and he pointed to the portrait of Lieut. Floyd.

"Ah!" ejaculated the sergeant, as he made another entry. Then he left the room, and proceeded to search the mansion from top to bottom, from garret to cellar. But nothing was disturbed, nothing taken.

Ten minutes afterward Clinton Craig, in company with his friend who so nobly stood by him, and with the sergeant, entered a carriage in waiting, amid the wild hooting of the throng. A moment and the vehicle jolted away.

An officer was left at the Floyd mansion, with orders to admit no one save members of the family.

Only a few moments elapsed before, Clinton Craig was standing before an alderman. The small room was crowded almost to suffocation, while a shouting mob outside made the night hideous.

Near the alderman's desk stood Mr. Miller, the superintendent of the factories, old Barton and the boy with the skates. The lad also carried a gentleman's silk hat.

For a moment there was a breathless silence as the alderman conferred with the sergeant in an undertone. At length the legal functionary turned toward the young man who was now standing firm and alone, and said:

"An unpleasant task for me, Mr. Craig; but, duty is duty. You are arrested, sir, on the suspicion of having murdered your best friend—your adopted father."

"I am innocent of the crime, sir! innocent, sir, before God and man!"

The words were spoken bravely, defiantly.

Dr. Ashe watched his friend with burning eyes.

"That is not for me to decide; the courts will decide that matter," said the magistrate, with dignity. "I must see if the suspicions are supported by ample evidence, evidence sufficient to warrant your commitment for trial. Now, answer me only this question; are you, directly or indirectly, interested in the property held and owned by Thompson Floyd?"

The question was plain and pointed. The answer was not slow in coming.

"I have good reason to think that I am," replied the prisoner, boldly.

"Did your adopted father ever mention to you that he had made a testament, willing property to you?"

"He told me as much, more than once," was the calm reply.

"That will do, sir," said the alderman, as an expression of pity passed over his face. Then turning to the old domestic, he said:

"Eldredge Barton, swear on the Holy Evangelists, or affirm, that you will speak the truth and naught but the truth, to the questions which I may put to you."

The oath was administered, and old Barton gave his evidence. It was meager, amounting simply to this:

Mr. Thompson Floyd had told him on the afternoon in which the old gentleman left the house, that he had received a note, or a message, from Mr. Miller, superintendent of the factories, requesting him to go out to Manayunk and have a talk about some derangement of the machinery. A rough-looking man had brought the note. That he, Barton, after two days' anxious waiting, had gone to Manayunk and seen Mr. Miller. To his surprise, Mr. Miller had heard nothing or seen nothing of the old gentleman; nor had he sent a note.

Mr. Miller himself was then sworn, and testified that he had neither sent a messenger or a note to Mr. Floyd, and that the mill was in no way deranged.

The lad with the skates stated under oath, that he was skating out on the river by Fairmount dam, and for a compensation offered by a policeman had ventured out on the ice and secured the hat which was half-imbedded in the river.

The magistrate reached over and taking the hat from the boy, read in it, aloud, the name:

"THOMPSON FLOYD, *Spruce street.*"

A loud murmur filled the room.

Then the alderman looking up, said:

"The police-sergeant informs me that the pistol belonging to Mr. Floyd is missing. Now, Mr. Craig, tell me the nature of your wound."

The young man started violently; his face paled and it was with difficulty that he controlled himself.

"It is a wound from a bullet, sir," he answered, in a voice just above a whisper.

Another loud murmur ran through the room.

"Gun, rifle or pistol?" pursued the alderman.

"Pistol, sir; but—it was an accident."

The apartment was as silent as death.

"An accident, sir? Ah! well; we must look a little further into—"

At that moment there were loud voices out by the door, and then ensued some confusion and jostling in the crowd, as a tall man elbowed his way rudely through the throng. In a moment more Algernon Floyd, panting with exertion but calm and composed, strode forward.

"I beg your honor's pardon," he said, inclining his head to the law functionary; "but I am come on important business. Mr. Craig is—"

"Volunteer no evidence, unless you are sworn, Mr. Floyd," interrupted the alderman, suggestively.

Algernon Floyd's face reddened; but he simply bowed, and said:

"I was only anxious, sir, to do justice. I perhaps forgot the requirements of the law. I am ready to be sworn, your honor."

He placed his lips reverentially to the Testament. As he did so, he gave a quick, glittering glance toward Clinton Craig.

That young gentleman was aghast with astonishment; but Fred Ashe never removed his gaze from Algernon Floyd's dark face.

"Now, Mr. Floyd, you can speak," said the alderman.

"What I have to say, your honor, can be told in a few words."

"Go on, sir."

"Clinton Craig knows nothing of this affair. A day or two since I saw him wounded by the accidental discharge of a pistol. Besides, sir, this afternoon, while searching through the library of my uncle's mansion, in company with the officer left in charge of the premises, I found this slip of paper with the writing on it, which you may see. It confirms me entirely in my preconceived opinion; namely, that my unfortunate uncle has committed suicide by drowning."

As he concluded he handed a strip of paper to the alderman. The room was hushed to the completest silence as that person took the scrap of paper and cast his eyes over it. Then, in a tone of some surprise, he read aloud thus:

"Yes! yes! at times I am wretched, and weary of life. Memory will not cease to goad me; and forms and faces of dead ones gone forever, forever haunt me! Can I live this burdensome life? Or, shall I take my life in my own hands? Have I such a right? Alas! yes! beneath the crushing wheels of a rushing locomotive, or under the dark waters of the Schuylkill, all trouble, all woe, all bygone memories would be forgotten! all anguish buried, all sorrow forgotten!"

A pin could have been heard to fall as the alderman slowly laid aside the scrap of paper.

"There is no name to this," he said; "but it is the writing of Thompson Floyd; for I know it myself. Under these circumstances I beg to say that you are discharged, Mr. Craig."

Leaning on the steady arm of Dr. Ashe, young Craig slowly made his way through the hushed throng. As he passed near the dark-bearded man, his enemy—whose evidence had cleared him, he said in a whisper, but very earnestly:

"From my heart I thank you, Algernon Floyd!"

"There is no need or occasion, Clinton Craig," was the peculiar reply, given in the same low tone.

CHAPTER XIX.

GROPING.

SLOWLY, gradually the dark object by the wall assumed shape and then motion. Slowly straightening up as it moved along hugging the wall, it grew into the form of a brawny man; but that man deformed, a hideous lump on the shoulder marring what might otherwise have been an elegant form.

Reaching a small gate the man placed his hands upon it and sprung lightly over. He paused again, fearing that his footfall might betray him. But again he strode onward until he stood beneath a window in the rear of the magnificent mansion.

The hour was between twelve and one o'clock, and the darkness was inky.

"All's well!" he muttered. "Ay! so far, all's well. Courage, brave heart, and be true to your master! I am working for high stakes, and upon the single turn of Fortune's wheel depends success or failure. I cannot fail now, no! Everything has happened too well thus far to—*Happened?* Yes; ha! ha! my lucky star be praised. But now to work. Yonder is the window, below it the lock, and I have the key. I must do my best now with the line."

As he spoke, he drew from his bosom a small, slender cord, knotted at regular intervals with cross-pieces. When secured to a point and extended it would make a ladder.

The man hesitated a moment; and, peering sharply above him in the blackness, he swung the coil around his head and let it fly. But, almost instantly, it rattled down in a confused heap at his feet. It had not caught.

"Too low!" was the growling ejaculation. "I'll try again."

Once more he flung the cords up against the wall; and once more the attempt was a failure.

"Curse such luck!" muttered the fellow, angrily and excitedly. "I'll arouse that drowsy policeman; then I'll not only lose my chance, but raise the very devil himself. Here goes again!"

He suited the action to the word. This time he met with better success; for the line caught fast to some projection on the wall above, and held.

The man cautiously pulled on it—even going so far as to bear his weight on the slender cords. But they did not give way; they were made of good stuff.

Without waiting further the fellow began the ascent of the swaying ladder, and in a moment he paused directly under the window above. He listened long and keenly; but all was still.

Cautiously the man passed a thin-bladed knife under the shutter. Pressing on it steadily he suddenly but softly opened the shutter. Again he paused for a moment; but it was only for a moment. He noiselessly pushed up the sash, and in an instant had leaped lightly into the room.

The apartment was the library of old Thompson Floyd. The door leading out was closed.

For a moment the midnight visitor stood still and flashed his eyes around him in the gray darkness. Then groping his way around the table he finally reached the iron safe, to which reference has been made. Stooping, he drew from beneath his coat a small dark-lantern, and, turning the light partly on, drew a key from his pocket and inserted it slowly and carefully into the lock. But the hidden bolts refused to yield. Again and again he turned the key; and always with the same result.

"Hang it!" he muttered between his teeth. "The old man grew cautious before he—well,

before he committed suicide. But I dare say I know his trick."

He drew out a pocket-knife, and thrusting one of its small blades into the key-hole, pushed it straight in. A slight snap was heard. Again introducing the key, he turned it. The bolts moved smoothly back, and the safe was opened.

Then ensued a long search. Every drawer was taken out and its contents noted; every package of papers was looked through, and still the man was not satisfied. At last he had gone through everything in the safe. He paused and whistled softly to himself. But he carefully restored the drawers and papers to the safe, and noiselessly locked the ponderous iron door. As he slowly straightened up, the light from his lantern fell on his face and revealed a strange blending of expressions resting there. Disappointment was plainly to be seen; but along with it was an ill-concealed expression of joy and hope.

"'Tis not here!" he muttered. "Then, by heavens! he did not make one after all! If so, 'tis all the better!"

Saying this, he drew the screen over the face of the lantern, hid it beneath his coat, and drew near the window. Leaning out, he arranged the ladder of cords with a running noose, cautiously got out upon it, lowered the sash, closed the shutter and descended, drawing the frail support after him.

CHAPTER XX.

LAW AND JUSTICE.

SOME weeks have elapsed since the events recorded in the foregoing chapter. But they were not idle weeks with those whom we have introduced to the reader.

It had become a settled conviction that poor old Thompson Floyd had committed suicide, in a "moment of temporary insanity," as the papers have it. And, indeed, it looked so.

The city had authorized the dragging of the river near the dam, but this eventuated in no satisfactory result. Moreover, to do this entailed much labor and trouble, for it had been necessary to cut a drift through the already thick ice.

In addition to this, Clinton Craig had offered large rewards for any information which might throw some light upon the old gentleman's untimely taking off. But all was unavailing; the hat taken from the ice alone pointed to the solution of the mystery.

At last funeral services were held over—or rather in memory of—the deceased, and gradually the affair faded from public notice. In three weeks from that startling night of events, as before given, the mysterious occurrence was seldom referred to, and scarcely created remark.

So soon are the dead forgotten.

At the funeral sermon, which was given in the fine Spruce street mansion, Algernon Floyd was present, calm and dignified and honoring the occasion with a black band around his hat, and a piece of crape about his arm.

Another point we will note here: As soon as it was settled that Mr. Thompson Floyd was dead, his dark-browed nephew had returned to the rich mansion, bringing his effects with him. To this, Clinton Craig, indignant though he was, could say nothing. He was not the master; but Algernon Floyd was the *old man's* blood nephew—his only relative in the wide world! He, then, of all others, had a good right to make the mansion his home. So the law looked at the matter; and Algernon Floyd had duly consulted with legal talent.

Then the question of the will came to the surface; and soon afterward it was mysteriously hinted that the old man had left no will! This report speedily reached the ears of Clinton Craig. For a while he paid no attention to it; but again and again the rumor reached him, each time bringing with it something more of authority, something more than a vague shadow of truth; and there was more reason that the young man should pause and look into the matter. Clinton Craig had noted Algernon Floyd's presence at the mansion, his quiet, independent way, his unopposed gliding into

authority. Coupled with the rumors which were coming daily, this latter circumstance made the young man stop and think. And as he thought he trembled.

The reader can well understand why Clinton Craig trembled. The young man, on those occasions, was thinking of Minerva. How would she like it, should Algernon, and not himself, succeed to old Thompson Floyd's estate?

And Clinton Craig well knew that if he inherited nothing from his adopted father's property, *he would be a beggar!*

This thought staggered him.

These same rumors, spreading everywhere that it could find an ear, in due time reached Minerva Clayton, the bank-president's daughter. When the maiden first heard it, she was making an elaborate evening toilet to receive Clinton Craig, whose arm, be it remarked, had now so much improved that he went out without inconvenience. The girl was standing before the elegant mirror, arranging her dark, heavy tresses, when Margarette, her maid, entered the room.

"There is some strange news in the streets, Miss Minerva," said the domestic.

"Ah! yes; what is it?" asked Minerva, languidly, as she looped up her hair.

"Why, they say, ma'am, that the rich old Mr. Floyd left no will; that Mr. Clinton Craig is out in the cold, and that Mr. Algernon, who I always thought the handsomest, with his fine black beard, is to get all the piles of money!"

News indeed!

The effect of it on Minerva was startling. The blood streamed to her face; then her cheeks were ashen hued. She tottered back and sunk into a chair.

"Yes, yes, Margarette; that *is* news!" she muttered. "But you can go now."

The girl, with wonder showing on her face, turned to go; but as she laid her hand on the bolt, Minerva said to her:

"One word, Margarette; should Mr. Craig come here this evening, see to it that *you* answer the bell, and say 'not at home,' for me!"

"Yes, ma'am," and the girl left—wondering, perhaps, at the fickleness of woman's heart, for, but an hour before, she had been instructed to receive young Craig with her blandest smiles, and to conduct him to the little private parlor to the rear.

When the maid had gone, Minerva reared her head like a tigress at bay, and glared fiercely around her.

"And is it to end thus?" she ejaculated, hoarsely. "Must my ambitious striving thus fall short? Nay! I swear I'll not be thwarted. Thompson Floyd's money added to mine—ye gods! Where would it place me? And to think that but now I held it at my beck and call. Can this hideous report be true? Or is it only an ugly, distorted dream? Arouse you, Minerva Clayton, and decide! Would you throw aside a dark-bearded, lordly-looking man with loaded coffers, for a fair-bearded ladies' pet with small hands and blue eyes? We'll see! ay! we'll see!"

Her voice sunk to an inaudible mutter.

For long, weary hours Minerva Clayton sat there, half robed in her splendid evening toilet. But as the moments and the hours flew by the gloom and chagrin settling on her brow passed away, and the smile of a dawning triumph broke over her face.

"Yes!" she murmured, gripping her hands together. "I see my way. And it is well—very well!"

That evening when Clinton Craig, buoyant and happy, despite the vague fear of impending trouble which was annoying him, ascended the steps of the princely Clayton mansion he rung the bell with a bold and confident hand.

His summons was rather tardily answered by Margarette.

The young man at once with a smile of recognition to the girl walked into the vestibule, and was about entering the passage, when Margarette half-barred his way and said quite curtly:

"Miss Clayton—not at home, sir."

"Not at home, Margarette?" asked the young man, in surprise, a vague fear stealing over his heart.

"Not at home, sir," was the reply.

"You must be mistaken, Margarette. I have a note from Miss Clayton bidding me to call this evening."

"Of that I know nothing, sir; but I am instructed by the young lady to say 'not at home' to you," and half-forcing the young man from the vestibule, she closed the door.

Astounded and almost bereft of his senses, Clinton Craig staggered down the steps and reeled almost helplessly away in the dark, scowling night. But a blacker night of woe and misery had settled over the young man's soul, as, tottering along, he chanced to glance aloft at the lordly pile, and saw behind a gauzy curtain, in a certain brilliantly-lit room, the queenly form of one whom he worshiped madly.

We hasten.

This dim, uncertain report that old Thompson Floyd had left no will came to the ears of another—of Dr. Ashe. In him there was no surprise manifested; no starting—nothing but a stern, suspicious frown wrinkling his brow, a momentary clenching of his hands. When he heard the rumor he was seated in old Mr. Ray's parlor chatting pleasantly in an old-fashioned familiar way with Alice.

And when Alice had heard the report, which, should it prove true, would so change the fortunes of one still dear to her, she clasped her hands and murmured:

"Poor, poor Clinton!"

Dr. Ashe glanced quickly at her; but jealousy did not gleam in his eye; for there was none in his heart. While the same stern frown rested on his brow, he said:

"I thought as much, and mark me, Alice, the report will prove true."

One more prominent character of our story heard the report. This was Algernon Floyd. He was sitting in his same old room in the mansion, reading an afternoon paper, when a coarse-looking man entered the apartment without knocking.

"Ah, Algy!" he said, seating himself familiarly. "Strange news is abroad in the city!"

But Algernon Floyd scarcely lifted his eyes from the paper, as he answered:

"I hope it is good news, Jem?"

"You can judge for yourself, Algy. Why, 'tis said that the old man Floyd shuffled off this mortal coil *without leaving a will!*"

Algernon Floyd showed no surprise whatever. He simply ejaculated:

"Ah?" and arising from his chair strode, once or twice, up and down the room. Then he paused and said carefully:

"This is very good news, Jem. I dare say it is true. Ay! and, Jem, suppose *we* had found my poor uncle's body under the cold water, where would Clinton Craig have found the money to pay the large reward he offered? But now, Jem, we will see what *law and justice* will do!"

CHAPTER XXI.

CLOUDS AND SUNSHINE.

"AND this very day, Fred, the commission appointed to search the premises for the will meet here to begin the work! Oh! Heaven, that such a cloud should so suddenly envelop me!"

Up and down the room Clinton Craig strode nervously and excitedly.

Fred Ashe, calm and quiet, opened not his mouth. He gazed silently, sadly out of the window; but he was not indifferent to his friend, who was suffering such tortures of mind. The young man was thinking; so he preferred to say nothing.

"Oh, Heaven, Fred!" again broke in the young man. "She has turned against me! She whom I so fondly loved. She has heard of my altered fortunes, and, heartless, pitiless, has steeled her heart, and set her face against me."

"And I tell you, Clinton Craig, I thank God for it!" suddenly exclaimed the doctor. "If this woman has, indeed, turned her back on

you—and you know not positively that she has—I tell you, my dear fellow, that you have made a lucky escape even at the loss of an immense fortune. Nay, let me speak, Clinton. I love you, my friend, and you know it. Minerva Clayton is a deep woman, one of many wiles and schemes, one whose ambition to be wealthy is as unscrupulous as it is unbounded! She loved you, Clinton, for your expected moneys—as she would love me, or any one else possessing enough of this world's lore to attract her. But, hold!—I *will* speak! Minerva Clayton's love for you was engendered by old Thompson Floyd's piles of gold and silver—his factories and his mills. Again I say, Heaven be praised if such indeed be the case, that you are rid of her! You are young, Clinton; you are active and vigorous; you are proud and self-reliant; and though unaccustomed to look necessity in the face, yet I doubt me not but that you can easily carve a way for yourself. And, Clinton, should the worst be realized, why, though I am not over-blessed with worldly goods and chattels, yet what I have, I'll share with you."

"God bless you, my dear friend!" exclaimed young Craig, seizing the physician's hands in his. His voice was husky with emotion as he continued:

"But, Fred, you inspire me with a noble ambition. I will not be a burden on you. Should necessity come upon me, I will work! I *will* carve my way, and prove to Minerva Clayton that I *am* worthy of her!"

"You are more than worthy of her! Take my advice, my dear boy, and let Minerva Clayton pass from your mind."

"Oh! Fred! I cannot yet! I cannot resign her without a struggle. I must see her and talk with her; I must appeal to her and hear from her own lips her rejection of me. Oh! Heaven! I cannot, will not believe it!"

"Appeal to her!" muttered Fred Ashe, almost with a hiss. "Humiliate yourself before her! Never, Clinton, or, by heavens, I'll be ashamed of you!"

"Fred! Fred! you almost craze me. *You* know not what love is!"

Like lightning Dr. Ashe seized his friend by the wrist, and glared at him with a strange look. But he slowly relaxed his hold as he said, in a low voice, while he laughed a quiet, soft laugh:

"You know me not, my friend! I am under the impression that I, pretty exactly, understand what love is; for—Well, let that pass. You only heed my advice concerning Minerva Clayton, and—"

"I cannot, Fred! I must see her once more. Then, if she, alas! says *no!* all will be over; and with God's help I'll be myself again!"

"I'll counsel you no further against your will, Clinton. I did not wish to see you humiliated. Perhaps, however, if you can have your own way in this affair it will be best. But what you do, take my advice and do at once."

"This very day, Fred! Stand by me, my friend, in this matter. You alone—"

"Doubt me not, Clinton," interrupted the young physician, earnestly.

For a long time the two young men sat without speaking, each one communing with himself. A half-hour passed thus, when Dr. Ashe turned slowly toward his friend, and, in a low, but distinct voice, said:

"I have been thinking of this matter, Clinton, and I have come to the conclusion that Algernon Floyd knows something about it; he may know something about his uncle's suicide."

"What mean you, Fred?" asked the other, quickly, the dark shade of a suddenly awakened suspicion passing like lightning over his face.

"I mean simply what my words imply," was the quiet reply.

"No; you do him wrong, Fred. Let justice be done even to him, for his testimony, volunteered before the alderman, released me from an ugly predicament."

"Ay! and himself from the strong grasp of

the law, my friend," said the young physician, calmly. "That testimony was intended to cover up the duel, to shield himself. Perhaps the fellow had other motives, too."

Fred Ashe looked grave.

"I shudder at what your words imply, Fred. What Algernon Floyd knows of my adopted father's will—should he have left one—I can't say; but I am sure he was never in the confidence of his uncle. He seldom had access to the library where the old gentleman kept his papers. I, myself, was present a few days ago when the preliminary search was made; and, what is more, since Algernon's return to the mansion, a policeman has guarded the door to the library. Algernon Floyd could not have entered that room."

There was a pause.

The doctor looked perplexed.

"As to Algernon's knowing aught of the poor old man's sudden death I cannot believe; for on the fatal afternoon when my father went away so mysteriously, never to return, I saw Algernon hastening down Chestnut street. And that at a late hour."

Still the doctor mused. At length he looked up.

"Yes; you are right, Clint," he said. "Of course that circumstance clears him. May Heaven forgive me for my suspicions against the fellow! They were dark enough!"

Just then a rap sounded on the door; and almost immediately the tall form of Algernon Floyd flung a shadow into the room. He started slightly as he saw Dr. Ashe, but quickly recovering himself, he bowed and said, stiffly:

"The commission has arrived, Mr. Craig, and, as you are interested, your presence is requested at the search. If Dr. Ashe," he continued, turning to that gentleman, "will not consider it too irksome, I would be pleased if he, likewise, would be present."

The physician bowed his acknowledgments, and accompanied the others from the room.

It was difficult to suppose that Algernon Floyd was interested in the search which was about to take place; for his tone was almost icy in coolness, and there was nothing whatsoever about him to indicate the least excitement.

The library was reached and the search begun. Two policemen accompanied the four gentlemen who had been delegated to examine into the matter. Every drawer was ransacked; every package was overhauled. But no will, and nothing indicating one, was found. There remained only one chance, only one probability of such a paper being brought to light; and that was in the search through the safe. But that secure receptacle was locked, and there ensued a long and fruitless search for the key. Algernon Floyd quietly suggested that the door be forced. This was tried; but it resulted unsuccessfully. At last it was determined to send for an expert to pick the lock. After some delay one was found; but more than two hours elapsed before the expert succeeded in fitting a key. But at last the heavy door was opened, and the search for the will resumed.

There were hundreds of papers and memoranda to be examined in the safe, and this consumed much time.

At last the search was finished. The safe-door was closed; and the members of the commission, without communicating to any one the result, took their leave.

But on Algernon Floyd's face shone a bright though transient gleam of satisfaction as he glanced covertly toward young Craig.

As they were about leaving the room, the dark-browed nephew looked up, casually, at his father's portrait. He started.

"How is this, Barton?" he asked, turning to the old servant who stood near. "Where is the cord—the silken cord—that was attached to that frame?"

He glanced sternly at the old man.

"Really, I can't say, sir," replied Barton. "It has been missing for some weeks."

"Missing? How?"

"Why I thought you had taken it away with you, yourself, Mr. Algernon," said Barton, who was now excessively polite to a probably new master.

"I take it away!—and leave the portrait! Nonsense, Barton! See to it that a thorough search be made for that cord. Valueless though it may be in itself, I tell you it is worth to me more than all the wills in existence!"

So saying, he strode out.

About four o'clock that afternoon, the commission, accompanied by a legal gentleman, returned to the mansion. They gathered silently in the library—Algernon Floyd and Clinton Craig duly presenting themselves. The lawyer glanced around and arose. After a slight pause, he said, with a glance at the two young men just named:

"I am authorized, gentlemen, to report the result of the search for the will of Thompson Floyd, deceased. It is positively known, and has been verified, that the deceased, during his life-time stated that he intended willing his property for the most part to Clinton Craig. But, after a diligent and exhaustive search, not only has no will been found to such an effect, but no will of whatsoever nature; and nothing indicating that one has been made. In view of this fact, in view, too, of the fact that Thompson Floyd has left only one living relative, it is not only natural, but absolutely legal, that the property should and must descend to that relative. That relative is Algernon Floyd; he is the lawful heir to the entire estate left by the deceased. Here is the safe-key, Mr. Floyd," turning to the swarthy-faced nephew; "and allow me to congratulate you on your good fortune."

A wild blaze of undisguised triumph glittered in Algernon Floyd's eyes; but in an instant he controlled his emotion and bending low to the commission he took the key.

Clinton Craig, crushed almost to the earth for a minute, slowly rallied, and bowing courteously to the decision, turned and left the room. Once in his own chamber his feelings for a moment got the better of him, and a wild, angry storm raged in his bosom. But the tempest was momentary. He soon recovered himself. He wrote a brief note and sent it to Dr. Ashe, that gentleman having left the house without a word as soon as the morning search was over.

Then Clinton Craig wrote another and much longer letter, and taking his hat left the house and posted the missive himself.

About the same time that Clinton was thus engaged Algernon Floyd was similarly occupied. And he, too, deposited his letter in the penny-post bag.

That evening as Dr. Ashe, quiet, unobtrusive and sympathizing, sat in Clinton Craig's room, watching his friend pack up his personal effects, previous to a speedy removal, a loud rap fell upon the door. In a moment mere Algernon Floyd stood in the room. A frown was on his brow as he bowed curtly.

An angry scowl swept over young Craig's face; but checking himself he arose and bending an inquiring look upon his visitor waited for him to speak.

"Pardon me, if I disturb you for a moment," said Floyd, coldly, his gaze resting unflinchingly upon Clinton Craig's face. "We are not warm friends, Mr. Craig, and have never been so. Perhaps, so far as I am concerned, you can readily infer the reason. 'Tis best that we part. Of course you know that the claims you had upon my uncle do not extend to me. This mansion is now mine, and, as I am privileged to select my own company, I scarcely think it more than necessary to suggest to you the propriety of seeking accommodations elsewhere."

The hot blood of anger burnt in Clinton Craig's cheeks, and a stormy reply was upon his lips; but by a strong effort he kept his temper within bounds as he replied, calmly and with dignity:

"I shall not burden you with my presence, sir. I leave this house within an hour. I ask your indulgence for that length of time."

For a moment a blush of shame mantled the swarthy face of Algernon Floyd; but it passed away. He bowed and left the room without another word.

It was nine o'clock that night when Clinton

Craig, arm in arm with his steadfast friend Dr. Ashe, issued from the Floyd mansion. A furniture wagon was standing before the door; it had already been loaded with young Craig's baggage. Then the young man turned his back on the house, which, for so many years, had been his happy home.

As the friends neared the residence of Dr. Ashe, suddenly a fire-peal rung out on the air. Again and again they came, and every moment the peals rung louder.

Toward the north-eastern section of the city, the sky was aglow with a dull livid light. Higher rung the sounding bells, more ruddy grew the encrimsoned sky; and now the hoarse cries of heroic firemen, and the hollow rumbling of the engines, awoke the stillness of the air.

"Where is the fire?" shouted Dr. Ashe to a fireman who was hurrying by.

"In the Richmond district—old Squire Ray's lumber-yard! And it's as good as gone!"

This was the reply that came back.

"Come! come, Clinton! We are needed there!" cried the doctor. "Come! jump into this carriage, and we'll be off. Poor, poor Alice!"

The two young men hailed the passing carriage, sprung in, and were soon rattling away toward the fire.

CHAPTER XXII.

PRIZE-MONEY.

BUT Algernon Floyd, sitting late that night in his uncle's library, heeded not the clanging bells. With countless papers spread before him, here and there large bags, heavy and jingling forth a metallic sound, he sat at the table, pencil in hand, jotting down this item and that, calculating this interest bond and that.

From the inside breast-pocket of his coat peeped the butt of a pistol; he felt it necessary to arm himself, to defend his newly-gained wealth. There he sat, counting, jotting, thinking, dreaming wild, limitless, incomprehensible dreams, all the while.

"At last! At last! I've won, I've triumphed!" he exclaimed, throwing himself back into his chair. "Money, almost exhaustless, is subject to my check; men will worship me as a newly-risen god. Algernon Floyd's name, even now, is sounding richly in every ear, a gorgeous career opens up before me! Ye gods! I sometimes think, now, that I will go mad with my triumph, my victory, my wealth! And beauty shall be mine! That beauty impersonated in the form of—"

A low, gentle rap at the door startled him. He cast a hasty glance at the clock, felt quickly for his pistol, pushed the money-bags behind him, and said, aloud:

"Come in!"

Immediately the door was opened, and a short, burly man entered.

"You here, Jem! What the deuce—"

"There, there, Algy, don't get into a perspiration. There is no occasion. Yes, it is I, your old friend, Jem Walton. Come to congratulate you, Algy, my boy, and suggest to you, faintly, now that you can handle the prog—ain't it prog, Algy?—why—I'd just like to touch the spuds, the prize money, you know."

"You are an infernal impudent—"

"Stop, Algy—stop!" said the man, sternly. "I did not come here to be abused, and I didn't sneak in the house, either. I came in the front door, and though the hour is late, I asked to see you and was shown here. So don't be ugly," and the man, casting his slouch hat on the floor, seated himself, as if he was at home.

It was a terrible frown that wrinkled the dark, swarthy face of Algernon Floyd; and more than once his right hand moved toward the pistol; but Jem Walton's lynx eyes followed his every motion.

"Come, come, Algy," said the fellow, with an attempt at soothing the other, "if I'd known you were so opposed to seeing me, I would have waited until to-morrow. But I thought, as we

were old friends, why, you'd be glad to see me," and he laughed sardonically.

"Well, Jem Walton, what do you want? Out with it, and quick, too!"

"MONEY, Algernon Floyd! and I'll have it, too! Is that answer near enough to the point?" returned the man, promptly, with a look of determination and defiance on his face.

"You speak well—boldly, I may say!" returned Floyd, trembling just the slightest; not with fear, but with anger. "I'll not bandy words with you. How much money do you want?"

"That's good! *How much?* All I can get! But, hark you, Algy: your memory is getting bad; I'll refresh it. For my little services, you know, and a quiet tongue, the agreement was that, as soon as you could touch the pewter, I was to receive two thousand dollars down; one month from that time, two thousand dollars more, and then I was to make myself scarce in these parts. That's the agreement. I'm posted, my friend, and I am here to get my part of the prog. So shell out, for I must be going."

He spoke almost authoritatively; he was certainly in earnest.

It was only for a moment that Algernon Floyd hesitated.

"I remember the bargain, Jem," he said, a little softer, "and I'll not fly from it. Here is a bag; it contains two thousand dollars. Count it for yourself, and then begone."

"No, you count it, Algy; I'll look on," said the man, keeping a suspicious gaze fixed on the other, and not moving at all.

"Very good, Jem Walton; but you are scary," replied young Floyd, taking the bag.

"As you say, Algy; I'll not contradict you. But please count the money, piece by piece."

The money was counted out. It made two thousand dollars, in large golden pieces. Replacing them in the bag, Algernon Floyd shoved them toward the man.

"Now, Jem Walton, *give me the OATH—our receipt.*"

The light, for an instant, was lowered. When it was raised, Jem Walton, bag in hand, was backing out of the door. Then he turned and hastened down-stairs, and out into the street.

Scarcely had he gone ten steps, before a dark figure emerged from the gloom and joined him.

"Ah! here you are, Jem? I've waited for you, patiently. Have you got the prog?"

"Safe and sound, Moll."

"Then, remember, my hand is on your throat, and I'll have half—"

There was no reply to this, as the two, the man and the woman, hurried away in the gray, thick darkness of the night.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TWO LETTERS.

THE next morning, languid, listless and yawning, Minerva Clayton cast her eyes over the local columns of the *Ledger*. The girl, despite the look of self-satisfaction and settled triumph of a few evenings ago, had not been entirely at ease since. The form of Algernon Floyd, tall, elegant, dark-bearded, dignified and hawk-eyed, had haunted her mind. Had she not reckoned too rashly, too hastily, on winning him and his *hundred thousands*? She knew that he was of a haughty, imperious nature, stern and unbending in some matters; yet she likewise knew that a year or so ago, the young man was ardently in love with her. She well recollected that she, almost with scorn, had repelled the advances of this penniless young man, and had told him quite plainly that no poverty-stricken youth could ever expect to win the hand of Minerva Clayton, the peerless. Despite this, however, there had been times when a faint glow of admiration for the elegant form and handsome, swarthy face of Algernon Floyd, the penniless, had flashed through her bosom. She knew his lion nature, his superb *hauteur*; and these traits, coupled with personal attractions, had more than once made Minerva Clayton pause and think. Her thoughts on such occasions were these: Have I

not money enough already?—will I ever receive an offer from such a fine-looking, *well-connected* fellow again? But when Clinton Craig came into the lists, she promptly answered the first of these questions in the negative, the second in the affirmative, and Algernon Floyd had passed from her mind, it seemed, forever.

But a new order of things had lately arisen, necessitating much reflection to see clearly the way ahead. And much reflection, despite her somewhat hasty decision of a few nights since, had Minerva Clayton, bold, beautiful, ambitious woman that she was, given the subject. But the result of her cogitations was to confirm her previous decision; to win at all sacrifice the dark-bearded, handsome Algernon Floyd, the wealthy; to cast overboard, forever, the light-haired, equally-handsome Clinton Craig, the penniless.

Yes, Minerva Clayton was languid and worn this morning; for in addition to her mental perturbation, the girl had been kept awake, nearly all night long, by the clanging fire-bells and the riotous rolling and rumbling of fire-engines. She cast her eyes down the local columns of the paper. Her gaze suddenly halted, as it fell on a short article captioned: "DISASTROUS FIRE—SAD ACCIDENT."

As she read a line or so of the paragraph in question, she started slightly. Then a malicious smile of contentment broke over her face. Holding the paper nearer to her, she read aloud, gloating, it seemed, with almost fiendish delight, over each word:

"DISASTROUS FIRE—SAD ACCIDENT."

"Last night, between nine and ten o'clock, the extensive lumber-yard of John Ray, Esq., was discovered by a private watchman to be on fire. The alarm was instantly given and the firemen were promptly on the spot. We are sorry to say, that despite every effort, the entire lot of valuable lumber was destroyed. Owing to the combustible nature of the material the flames spread with fearful celerity, putting at defiance every effort to check them. We are called upon to chronicle, in connection with this fire, the sad death of Mr. Ray, owner of the property. It seems that he was early on the spot and performed wonders to save his property, which was but partly insured. Forcing his way through burning piles of lumber in order to assist in blowing up some of the heaps, hoping thus to check the spread of the flames, his way of retreat was suddenly cut off and he perished horribly in the fiery element, in view of hundreds who were unable to afford him succor. He was a true man, a good citizen, and an excellent neighbor. His memory will always be green with those who knew him."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Minerva Clayton, showing her beautiful pearly teeth in glistening rows. "How Providence has ordered all this! Reduced to poverty in a single twenty-four hours—thrown upon their own resources. Clinton Craig and Alice Ray are aptly mated! Let them cultivate their budding loves, and, at last, they—"

Suddenly the bell rung, and a moment or so afterward a servant-girl entered the breakfast-room where Minerva was sitting. She carried two letters.

"For you, Miss Minerva, both of them, and—city letters."

"Hand them here, Margarette."

Taking the letters eagerly in her hands, the maiden glanced over the superscriptions. Her face fairly wreathed itself in smiles, as she recognized the handwriting on one envelope; but it was slightly, only slightly, wrinkled with a frown as she glanced at the other envelope, the plain, bold direction on which was equally well known to her.

"You can go, Margarette. Have breakfast served in half an hour, at which time papa will be up and ready."

She turned at once to the letters, taking first the one she had examined last. Slowly she read it through, now and then a changing shade passing over her countenance. When through, she laid it down, open, and secured it with a paper-weight. She took the other, and while a glow of unconcealed joy sparkled on her cheek and shone out from her eyes, she read it, word by word. Again she read it, and again. Folding it, quietly, she placed it away in her bosom and sat holding her hands, while an ecstatic smile hovered around her mouth. At last, tak-

ing up the letter which was under the paper-weight, she glanced hurriedly over it. Laying it aside, she drew toward her pen and paper, and commenced to write. She hastily scribbled a note and cast it aside. Then she wrote another note—more properly a letter—with which she took much pains.

She leaned back and the same joyous smile came again to her face. Reaching over, she rung the bell. Margarette appeared in a moment.

"Give these two notes to the boy and tell him to deliver them in person. One goes to the office of Doctor Ashe, the other to Mr. Floyd on Spruce street. Tell him to hurry."

The letters which Minerva Clayton received that cold winter morning through the penny-post were both LOVE-letters. One read:

"MY DARLING, SWEET MINERVA:—You cannot imagine how I long to see you, to press your warm, loving hand, to whisper to you again how dear you are to me, to hear you breathe my name and say your love is mine! And, darling, I can not tell you of the almost horror of my soul, the other evening, when, calling to see you at *your* request, I was informed you were not at home; yet, darling, methought that night, when my heart was so sorrow-stricken, that I saw your beloved form at the window. Nevertheless, darling, I make every excuse for you. Doubtless the exciting circumstances occurring lately in which I am interested—or rather, have been involved—have acted detrimentally on your system. Now, darling, a word or so more. Since I have known you, I have always been candid and confiding, and I will be the same, now. When in prosperity I aspired to your love, so, in adversity, I cling to it. I know that your soul is not sordid, that you look beyond the baser dross to the pure gold of a sincere love.

"Doubtless, by this time, you know full well the startling events occurring at the mansion of my late adopted father. *I have been entirely disinherited*: the law did it, and being just, I did not say nay; nor do I, in the least, murmur. Of course it was a shock to me, a terrible blow; for I had looked forward to our approaching marriage with feelings which can not be described. Alas! that marriage cannot now be consummated, and I do not ask you to stand to your engagement. But Minerva, I do ask you, trustingly, confidently, that you will still be mine, at some future day, a day I cannot name; but it will come, when I am able to offer you a home and independence, if not luxury. I beg you, darling, to let me see you to-morrow. I leave this house, now the property of Algernon Floyd, to-night. For a few days, I will be at the residence of my friend Doctor Ashe, where a note will reach me. Appealing to you, darling, by the love you have professed for me and which I know you bear toward me, to grant me an interview to-morrow, I am, as of old,

"Your own devoted

"CLINTON."

The other letter read thus:

"MISS CLAYTON—Pardon a few plain, unvarnished words from one who can from nature deal in none other. You may remember that two years ago, struck by your beauty of person and insnared by your amiability and gentleness of mind, I was brought, a worshiper, to your feet. I paid my vows sincerely and from an honest heart. My vows, however, fell on unlistening ears; you were deaf to me then. At that time, I did not press my claims, because, though feeling myself, in every respect, a man and a gentleman, yet I was penniless. It might have been presumption in me, had I thought of it, thought of your own boundless wealth and your station in society. But Love was blind. Two years have rolled by since then, and by a turn in Fortune's wheel I am to-day a wealthy man. My heart is still yours, and it, and all I possess, I again lay humbly, yet boldly, at your feet. If you are not indifferent to me, I would beg that you grant me an interview, some time to-morrow.

"Very respectfully,

"ALGERNON FLOYD."

This was the letter Minerva had placed in her bosom.

Since we have transcribed these notes, word for word, for the reader's benefit, we will give Minerva's answer to each. That to her old lover's letter read curtly thus:

"MR. CRAIG:—Yours of yesterday to hand. I am rather surprised at its contents; but in answer to the request, somewhat vaguely given, I only say, you can see me at home this evening after eight o'clock.

Respectfully,

"MINERVA CLAYTON."

The girl's answer to her new (yet old) lover, read thus:

"MY DEAR MR. FLOYD:—Yours of yesterday, breathing sentiments of admiration for me—unworthy object! has reached me. Believe me, my dear sir, that your words have awakened in me old-time regrets, regrets which I would fain turn to consolation. I would simply say that you never have been indifferent in my eyes. You are not now. The interview requested is most cheerfully accorded. Come to-day, between eleven and twelve, when, believe me, sir, I will be prepared to listen attentively to whatever you may wish to confide to

"Yours, very truly,

"MINERVA C."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TWO VISITORS.

MINERVA CLAYTON arrayed in all the splendor and fashion that wealth could afford, trembled slightly as she slowly descended the broad, velvet carpeted stairs, and took her way to the parlor. Between her fingers she was twirling a perfumed card; but as she drew near the parlor-door she hastily thrust the card in her pocket, and summoning all her firmness forced a sweet, winning smile to her face and entered the grand apartment as gorgeous as an Eastern queen.

Algernon Floyd, elegantly arrayed, tall and splendid, was striding up and down the parlor. He turned quickly as he heard the soft foot-fall behind him. Schooled as he was in the ways of the world, the young man started at the dazzling splendor of the maiden.

Minerva greeted him with a stately bow, at the same time extending her hand, frankly and cordially.

Bowing low over that soft white hand, Algernon Floyd murmured some incoherent words; but, then, with the grace of a prince, he led the maiden to a sofa and sat down beside her.

The conversation which ensued we will not narrate. We will simply state that in an hour after the arrival of Algernon Floyd he was supporting, on his broadclothed bosom, the magnificent, tressy head of Minerva Clayton; and when he left the apartment, hat and gloves in hand, he imprinted a kiss upon the girl's dewy lips while he murmured in her ear:

"Farewell, dearest—but only for a time!"

The day wore away; evening came with its twilight and shadows, and a black night settled down again over the Quaker City.

The bell had just sounded at the Clayton mansion, and a timid questioner, card in hand, stood without on the windy steps.

Margarette had answered the summons, and she looked rather superciliously upon the young man who stood there in the cold. She paid no heed to the card, contenting herself by saying stiffly as though she was mistress of the mansion:

"Miss Clayton expects you; she is in the parlor."

Young Craig—for it was he—recoiled before the imperious demeanor of the girl, and a cold chill crept apace over his heart. But noticing Margarette no further, he entered the hall, and, hat in hand and overcoat on his arm, turned into the familiar parlor of old.

The bank-president's daughter, erect and cold, stern and frigid as a marble Diana, stood in the center of the room, all glitter and magnificence.

One glance at her face and Clinton Craig started violently. Nervous and fearing, he was about to advance and greet her; but she checked him by a single look.

He paused as if shot.

"I received your note, Mr. Craig," she began steadily, "and I have granted you this interview. Be as brief, if you please, as is convenient. Perhaps you can make known your errand, standing. I have an engagement this evening."

These words were spoken in the iciest, the cruellest of tones, while a half-sneer flitted over the hard, stern face of the speaker.

"What! what is it, Minerva?" gasped the young man, in a choking breath.

"What is it? Forsooth! and you should know, Mr. Craig," was the answer.

"For heaven's sake, Minerva, explain this hideous change to me! Speak to me, darling!" he exclaimed, in an outburst of woe, as he drew nearer her. "Tell me, darling one, why you thus treat me? Oh! Minerva, I love you madly! I love the very air—"

"Bah! hold, Mr. Craig! It is not proper in me to listen to such words as these. I can not listen to them: *I am engaged to be married!*"

As if a thunderbolt had crashed at his feet, Clinton Craig, while a fearful shudder shook his frame, recoiled.

"Engaged! engaged! Ay! and to whom, but me, Minerva?"

"To Algernon Floyd," was the calm, freezing reply.

For a moment tumultuous torrents of blood flowed madly to Clinton Craig's face; then his cheeks were cadaverous in hue. But then, gradually, the wonted tinge of robust health came again to his face.

Slowly he gathered up his majestic hight, and, for a moment, gazing the treacherous woman fixedly in the face, he turned without further word or gesture, and left the house.

To her dying day Minerva Clayton forgot not that look.

Oh! fair and false Minerva! We dare not wish you peace and happiness!

CHAPTER XXV.

A LONG GAP.

Two long years have now elapsed since the incidents occurred as given in our last chapter. We can do no more than briefly refer to the many events which had happened in the meantime.

Two weeks from the time of her new engagement, Minerva Clayton was married, with much pomp and *eclat*, to Algernon Floyd, the young and handsome millionaire. It was a brilliant occasion; and the *monde* who attended it did not stop to inquire into the antecedents of bride or groom.

It is recorded of the event that it required three able-bodied clergymen to perform the nuptial rite; and when the ceremony was over, the bride and groom were overwhelmed with congratulations. But as they made their way out of the packed edifice to the carriage which was to convey them to the New York depot, *en route* for Europe, neither of them noticed a man clad in the everyday garments of a factory hand, who leaned against a lamp-post opposite the church and watched the couple as they descended the brown stone steps.

Yet, Fred Ashe, M. D., who happened at that moment to stride independently and haughtily by, knew that man clad in coarse raiment. For when he saw him, he stepped hastily to him, and drawing his arm in his, said sternly, but sympathizingly:

"Come, Clinton, my boy. This is no sight for you. You are humiliating yourself!"

And the two friends hurried away.

Algernon Floyd and his handsome wife were many long months in Europe. But, at last, they returned to Philadelphia, and took up their abode in the Floyd mansion, which, in the meantime, had been sumptuously fitted up.

And those who knew Minerva Clayton of old, fancied that they discovered a shade of sorrow, with deep furrowed lines, looking like disappointment marks, showing on her face.

Dr. Ashe certainly noticed these lines on the young wife's brow when once he had met her face to face in the bustling, crowded Chestnut street.

But Minerva declined to recognize him; and Fred Ashe would not know the woman who, for money, had trampled in the dust the love of an honest man.

If, however, Minerva, indeed, had her sorrows, she kept them from the outside world. She was often seen with her fine-looking, dark-browed husband, on the streets or on the drives.

With Algernon Floyd there were times when ominous, anxious frowns wrinkled his brow. Then it was frequent that hot, angry words fell from his lips. On such occasions, he was cross and snappish, even with his black-haired wife.

And these occasions were always noticed as following the visits of a stout, square-built, rough-looking man, who came quite often. And these strange visits began just as soon as Floyd and his wife had returned from their foreign tour.

Once, too, an old woman, decent and well-clad, yet masculine and strong-minded in appearance, had asked and gained admittance to Algernon Floyd's presence. At first the rich man pretended not to recognize his visitor, and was rudely turning away from her; but a single word from his strange visitor, caused him

at once to hurry up to her, speak, in a low breath, a hasty word in her ear, and bid her follow him to the library.

Then again the old woman came. It was a raw, dark evening in the fall. Algernon Floyd was walking moodily up and down the limits of the library—his favorite haunt—his dark face wrinkled in thought.

"Am I in a snare?" he growled. "Do Jem Walton and old Moll hold secrets of mine—enough to embarrass me? Or, is it merely little things of our *river life*? Bloody Moll talks queerly. Jem, of course, *knows*—and a good deal. Do I know enough against the rascal to swing him? yes, by Jove!—and to swing that old she devil, too!"

Is gold, after all, a blessing or a curse? Does it bring happiness and contentment? Ah! I once thought that it did; but there is something here," laying his hand upon his forehead, "that answers emphatically NO! But gold—"

Here the bell sounded clear and sharp. The rich man paused in his restless promenade, and a darker frown than ever passed over his face. He seemed to understand the jingle of the bell—to know the hand that pulled it.

He glanced at the clock; it marked the hour of nine. As a rap came upon his door he felt hastily in his pocket.

"An old lady—very anxious to see you, sir," said Barton, the serving-man, now fully reconciled to his new employer.

"Show her up, Barton, and—why, let the servants go to bed. Also send Margarette to Mrs. Floyd's room, and tell her—my wife—that I'll remain up until a late hour. I wish to read."

Barton, with a bow, withdrew.

Only a few moments elapsed before a loud, bold knock echoed upon the library door, and, without waiting, a tall, brawny woman entered. She closed the door behind her, and with her eyes fixed on the owner of the mansion she stood still.

Algernon Floyd glanced sternly, wickedly at her and ejaculated:

"Well?"

"Ay! and *well* it should be, my pretty captain! you can depend on it!" was the sharp reply. "You don't value your old acquaintances—*friends*, I might say—or you'd ask me to take a seat."

"Sit down, Moll; and—your business with me? I am tired of your coming here!"

"Tired, are you?"

"Yes. The servants must think strange of you coming at such an unseasonable hour. My wife has noticed it, too. It annoys me."

"Would not they and she think it much stranger if I should tell them a secret that I hold? ay! and hold safe, Captain Algy?"

Algernon Floyd started.

"What secret of mine do you hold more damning than that which I store up against you?" he demanded.

"Pshaw! man! you talk idly. I tell you, Algernon Floyd, my hands, even now, clutch your throat. Do you not think that a word from me would fling hemp around your neck? Bah!"

The last words she hissed in his face.

Like lightning the man started up and flung himself upon her.

In an instant a terrible though quiet struggle had begun. The woman was as strong and as active as a tiger, and her opponent gained no advantage over her. But, all at once, a knife glanced in the man's hand; its keen edge touched the woman's throat. But before it could strike deep, the cold barrel of a pistol was pressed to his temple, and the creaking of a trigger echoed on his ear.

"Hold, Algernon Floyd! or, by the heavens above us, you are a dead man!" hissed the amazon, as she pushed her vantage-ground.

Slowly the man recoiled; he flung his knife upon the table.

"There! there! Moll!" he muttered, in a half-whining tone; "we'll come to terms. Put up your pistol and sit down."

"For once, captain, you are wise! We *will* come to terms; but, hark you, my pretty fellow, I'll dictate those terms!"

Just then there was a slight shake of the bolt of the door opening into the front sitting-room.

Algernon Floyd and his singular visitor both turned; but they saw nothing. They saw naught of the white, scared face, the disheveled tresses, the wild, starting eyes of Minerva, who fled away, sickened and terror-stricken, in the darkness of the room.

The interview between Algernon Floyd and old Moll lasted more than two hours; and when, at last, the woman left, she carried away a bag of gold, while, in her right hand, she clutched a roll of crisp notes.

Yes; Minerva, the rich man's wife, had noted the comings and goings of this old woman, and of the stout, square-built man. The young wife knew that there was a secret, terrible perhaps, which had been kept from her. She felt that this woman and this man held over her dark-bearded husband an unknown, but a fearful power.

We must hasten.

Jem Walton and Bloody Moll often held long midnight conferences together in the little house on the river. On several occasions a swarthy negro of gigantic stature was present at these conferences; and he answered to the name of Black Ben.

As the reader knows, Clinton Craig, in a single day, had been cast forth into the world, and thrown upon his own resources. He was penniless and almost friendless. Dr. Ashe was true to him; he loved him now—sympathized with him more than ever. The young physician had placed his purse at his friend's disposal; but Clinton Craig did not touch it.

At once the disinherited young man set about getting employment; he was determined to let no time pass idly on his hands. At first he was disheartened; still he looked for work. And at length, Clinton Craig, lately heir-expectant to a princely fortune, was engaged as a common workman in a cotton mill at the Falls; and his munificent wages amounted to six dollars per week. Yet that pittance made him happy, for it gave him independence.

One day in passing through an apartment in the thundering factory, Clinton paused as if struck by lightning. He started back and gasped for breath.

Seated before a buzzing loom, her thin, white face bending over the flying shuttle, was Alice Ray. In a moment the young man was by her side. He reached down and took her small, attenuated hand in his. He clasped that hand in his own sturdy palm now hardened and browned by honest toil.

The girl gave one startled glance at him, and, half-springing to her feet with a wild, almost unmeaning love-light in her eyes, she murmured just loud enough for him to hear it:

"Heaven be praised! Clinton, dear Clinton! that we meet again! I know all!"

But the others in that bustling, busy mill noted not the incident, though it occurred right under their eyes.

And want, too—for she was now, not only an orphan, but almost penniless—had forced Alice Ray, the lumberman's daughter, into the mills.

And Providence had ordered this singular reunion between Alice Ray and Clinton Craig. It is needless for us to trace further their intimacy, which time, circumstance and God forced upon them.

Time sped on. Day by day young Craig grew in the favor of his employers. At last he was elevated to the lucrative position of book-keeper. The young man now ordered a light boat. In this he rowed himself and Alice down to the city; for they lived near Fairmount in an humble but neat boarding-house, together. Some of the most blissful moments of Clinton Craig's life were spent as he pulled his light skiff glibly over the glassy Schuylkill to and from work.

Dr. Ashe knew of all this; he knew, too, that, at the time we tie our broken thread, Alice was affianced to his friend "Clint."

CHAPTER XXVI.

SHADOWS ON THE SCHUYLKILL.

THE mellow moonlight of an autumn night glimmered down on the sleeping river, showering its silver radiance gloriously over the rippling waters, shimmering sadly through the leafless trees on the bank, while here and there in the dim, gray light, pale, spectral marbles marked Laurel Hill, the silent city of the dead.

The air was balmy, though crispy, for the sere leaves had fallen, and frosts had whitened the earth.

Gently glided the light boat over the placid surface of the river leaving scarcely a ripple behind it.

With long, slow strokes the man who had the oars drove the boat onward. It scarcely required an effort; for the current was with him, and the wind in his face, light and fitful. In the stern-sheets of the small craft sat a maiden—her shoulders wrapped in a warm shawl.

And between him who lazily rowed the boat and her who sat watching him with earnest, loving eyes, a sweet heart-talk was carried on.

All was quiet. On this particular night no noisy crews made the air discordant with shout and song; and the coquettish breeze alone toyed with the honeyed words that were flung to it by the loving two who sailed the waters under the autumn moonlight.

The reader knows who were the occupants of that light skiff that glided so gently down the stream toward the noisy, bustling city in the distance.

Clinton Craig was homeward bound; and Alice Ray, as was her custom, was with him. His and her work were over for the day.

Quietly, yet swiftly, the boat dropped down. Laurel Hill was now some distance behind them; the ice-houses on the shore, dim and unseen in the gray gloom of the autumn night, were reached; and there ahead of them stretched the shadowy outline of Girard avenue bridge.

As they neared this lofty structure Clinton Craig edged the boat off to the middle of the river.

"Where are you going, Clinton?" asked the girl in a low, sweet voice, as she looked up in some surprise.

"Through the second arch, where there are no rocks, darling," was the answer. "The river is so low that there is danger near the shore."

He continued to urge the boat toward the middle of the stream.

"No, no, Clinton; please go the old way," said Alice, half-appealingly; "it is more like our custom; and, darling, I love to hear the waters roar and splash against the rocks. I'll sit in the bow, darling, and warn you of the rocks, as I have done many a dark night."

"As you will, Alice," replied the young man, cheerfully, as he checked the boat, and by a few dextrous strokes pointed the bow toward the shore. "Give me your hand, darling. So. Now sit down and keep a bright look-out," he continued, as Alice stepped nimbly by him and seated herself in the head of the skiff.

They were now rapidly nearing the bridge; the boat was, every moment, feeling the stronger current rushing between the near shore and the massive granite buttress. It shot away like a great winged bird. A moment passed, and amid the roar and rush of the waters they glided beneath the dark, overhanging bridge.

Suddenly, however, the boat yawed, and swung, violently, half-bows around.

"Heigho! on a rock, Alice?" queried the young man, glancing behind him.

"No, darling; I grasped at a rose floating on the water; but, alas! I missed it. Back water, Clinton; for that rose—as it has played me a trick—I shall have!" and the girl laughed merrily. "Pull, Clinton! I've lost the rose; pull hard; you've been lazy enough!"

The young man laughed in response, and bent lustily to the oars. He reversed his seat, and, without coming about, gave way vigorously.

"Here it is! Ha! Clinton—quick!" exclaimed

the girl, hurriedly; at the same time she adroitly cast the light anchor over the bows, and brought the boat to a standstill.

The young man leaped to his feet and went forward.

Alice was bending low over the gunwale, her white hand clutching nervously what seemed to be a cord or sash. Mistaking its shape and dull red, faded hue for a rose, she had caught the tassel in her hand.

"I have not got the rose, Clinton," she said in a low breath; "but I have caught something. Take hold, Clinton, and relieve me. There is something at the end of this line. There! now, pull, Clinton!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SILKEN CORD.

As Clinton Craig leaned over and grasped the cord in his strong hands, a strange, unaccountable thrill passed through him. He shook like a leaf, as a wild shudder shot over his frame. Bracing his feet against the sides of his stanch little boat, he put forth his strength and commenced to haul in, hand over hand, slowly, yet steadily, the heavy something attached to the end of the cord; and then, at last, good heavens! a wild, piercing cry from Alice Ray, a half-cry of alarm from Clinton Craig, broke on the air. Slowly, above the surface of the water, in the little patch of moonlight that struggled through the bridge, the body of a man, the face hideous and eaten away, the bare skull, the clothes hanging about the skeleton form in shreds and tatters, appeared terrible and ghastly.

Alice Ray had swooned with very terror, and was lying in the stern-sheets of the boat, sobbing and moaning; but Clinton Craig slowly drew the dead form to him, and taking an extra turn around the rattling skeleton lifted it into the boat. As with feelings of loathing and disgust he deposited it on the bottom of the little skiff, a huge bag, evidently loaded with weights, broke loose, fell with a splash and sunk out of sight in the waters.

Slowly, Clinton Craig lifted his little anchor from its muddy bed. Then, his boat, feeling the current, floated swiftly out into the broad glare of the moonlight. He guided it not, but leaning down over the decayed, mutilated corpse, gazed fixedly at it. Suddenly he stooped lower; a sudden sight had caught his eye. He bent down and without any hesitation grasped it. Furiously he tugged at it.

It was a dirk-knife imbedded firmly in the vertebrae of the neck.

At length, by a mighty effort, he tore it out and held it up in the bright moonbeams.

With one loud cry of exultation, Clinton Craig staggered back to Alice and murmured:

"God be thanked! God be thanked! The murderer and the murdered are found; that man is my poor adopted father; and that dirk is the property of Algernon Floyd. Read here, too, the name engraved on this jeweled knife—read it, Alice."

The girl, trembling with excitement, turned her gaze on the rusted blade and read aloud:

"KIMCOLY FLOYD—U. S. N."

"Come, Alice—come! We sleep not to-night! Justice is at last here! I tremble at the result! God be thanked, for He has given us the evidence! Come, the officers of justice must be apprised of this. Steady, Alice! be not alarmed, for he is dead—ay! dead two years and more."

Speaking these words, he bent to the oars; and with the unnatural, horrible freight aboard, Clinton Craig drove his light skiff through the waters at a swinging stroke.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TALE THE WATERS TOLD.

* * * THE old gentleman nervously took his seat in the boat.

"You must row well, my men," he said, as he cast an uneasy glance toward the red, cold sky in the west and felt the raw wind sweeping in trooping avalanches down the river. "You must row well, and here's a dollar extra. I must reach the bridge as soon as possible."

This wind is too much for me, and the river is freezing."

"Never you fear, sir," said the short, square-built man who pulled the stroke oar, at the same time seating himself—"we'll take you to the bridge in a jiffy; and thank ye, sir, for the extra pewter."

The other rough-looking fellow, who was pulling the "bow," opened not his mouth, but kept his gaze fixed on the bottom of the boat. The man having the "stroke" reached out a boat-hook and shoved the boat, stern-off. Then, simultaneously, two pairs of oars fell, the boat's head was turned up-stream, and, in a moment, the light skiff was almost jumping out of the water under the long, heavy strokes.

It was now some time after sunset and the shades of night were settling fast. When the boat was well out in the stream it felt the down-setting current more, and, half-frozen as the waters were, it made slow progress. On they went, the strokes becoming longer and more labored, and still the bridge was not reached. Darker and darker it grew. At last, the bridge came in sight. It was so dark, that objects on shore and on the water were invisible. The man in the bow coughed.

"You had better go to the bow, sir; she'll run better," said the man pulling the stroke-oar.

The old gentleman, who sat shivering in the stern-sheets, arose at once and stepped forward. He was about to seat himself when, softly, suddenly, behind him, the tall man, pulling the bow-oar, arose, and turning like lightning, sprung on the old man. In an instant, his left hand had grasped the feeble throat; in another, his right had drawn from his pocket a long cord, knotted with a running hitch; in another instant he had slipped the noose over the old man's head, then around his neck, and hurling him, brutally, to the bottom of the boat, hauled on the cord with both hands. There was a spasmodic gurgling, a terrible heaving of the chest, and a writhing of that attenuated old form.

Still, the tall man, his feet on the other's breast, tugged at the straining cord.

"Now," he whispered, coarsely, to the dying man at his feet, "now, my respected relative, you see how valuable to me is this old silk sash, and how nobly now this queer old dirk-knife does me a turn," and with his right hand he drew a dagger, and raising it on high, he drove it, with a vicious, vengeful force, down deep into the old man's neck.

One terrible shudder, and the body lay still.

"Ha! by heavens! that was a good thrust, Jem! But I have jammed the old knife between the bones and can't get it out. It matters not, he is welcome to it!"

"Whist! Algy! whist! I hear oars! Quick! the bag to his feet, and overboard with him! Quick, Algy!—so—and it's all right!" he said, as the tall man did as directed, and hove the weighted body overboard into the dark waters.

"Pity we hadn't searched his pockets! but come, Jem, give way! give way! You have work to-night yet, and I, to-morrow. But what is done is well done!"

"Excellently well, Algy."

This was the boat that was followed ashore by old Moll on a particular night, the scenes of which have been fully described before; it was old Thompson Floyd who slept that night, by treachery, the last long sleep beneath the waters of the freezing Schuylkill; it was Jem Walton who pulled the "stroke," and Algernon Floyd the "bow," in the little boat that night; it was Algernon Floyd who murdered, in cold blood, his own uncle, and it was he who fired the vengeful shot at old Moll, though he knew not who it was. He had a secret already, and he wanted it well kept.

CHAPTER XXIX.

RIGHTED.

THE barge-house was lighted with a dozen candles hanging from the joists above. The beams shone upon a singular-looking group collected there.

Crouching near the door, her face buried in her hands, her frame shivering with terror, was Alice Ray.

Clinton Craig stood by her, his face stern, yet exultant, his eyes burning with a singular yet hopeful luster. Now and then he stooped and spoke words of comfort and cheer to the maiden, while he gently laid his hand upon the uncovered head of golden tresses.

Stretched upon a board in the center of the room was the hideous object—the dead body of the long-missing Thompson Floyd—fished from the waters by Clinton Craig.

Already the coroner was there, with a hastily-collected jury. They were all clustered around the repulsive object, gloomy and silent. Near by, stern and collected, stood the coroner's physician, Dr. Fred Ashe—his arms across his chest, his eyes glancing occasionally at the skeleton remains on the board, and then at Clinton Craig.

"Our duty is plain, gentlemen," at length said the coroner. "Dr. Ashe, state your opinion as to the manner of death of this man—Thompson Floyd, beyond a doubt—judging from what we have thus strangely learned."

"But a few words are necessary, sir; and, gentlemen," answered the doctor, "my opinion is that this man—Thompson Floyd—was first strangled with this sash until life was nearly extinct. But the knife, pulled from the bone by Mr. Craig, completed the murderous work. That knife was driven by a strong and steady hand, and judging from its position when found, the blade must have severed the external jugular vein and carotid artery at a blow. Death was, of course, then, almost instantaneous; and the man was dead before he was flung into the water."

In a few moments the jury rendered a verdict in accordance with the facts.

"We will now proceed to search the body," said the coroner, at the same time appointing two of the jury to perform the disagreeable task.

These gentlemen at once set to work. The overcoat pockets contained nothing but a pair of buckskin gloves and a handkerchief. Next the inside coat was searched. In the breast-pocket of this garment was found a short revolving pistol. The coroner examined it closely.

Every chamber was loaded.

As this was announced, Dr. Ashe glanced significantly at Clinton Craig, who still stood near Alice Ray, speaking low, soothing words in her ear.

Though the wound in the young man's arm had long been well—in fact forgotten—yet he understood that look; and as a strange, ghastly smile swept over his face, he telegraphed back an answer.

The other pockets of the coat contained nothing else of special value. In the vest pockets was found a roll of notes, water-sogged and valueless. The heavy watch was also found lying in its wonted pocket—the massive guard-chain being hooked into the shreddy button-hole.

Then the rotten pantaloons were searched.

One pocket contained a key. It was at once recognized as that fitting the iron safe in the Floyd mansion. The other pocket contained a large old-fashioned leather purse, wet through and almost dropping to pieces.

The search was ended.

The coroner took the old pocket-book, and pressing the water from it, carefully spread out the flaps. A few silver coins, and a decayed bank-note or so, were found. In addition to these, a small compact package, about two inches square, was taken out. This was a singular-looking parcel; it was wrapped in every direction with twine which still retained its strength.

The coroner cut the cords, and began to unwrap the package.

Every one—even Clinton Craig and Alice—drew near and gazed breathlessly on.

The first wrapper was of stout parchment. It had entirely resisted the action of the water. Another wrapper was removed. It was of

rubber. Then came the twine again. This was cut and another layer of parchment, and another of rubber were taken off. And so on until nine wrappers were laid on the table. At last all were removed, and two separate papers, folded into squares, and as hard almost as ivory, rolled out. They were perfectly dry.

With a look of intense wonder on his face, the coroner opened the little square packages, and laid them before him. A pin might have been heard to fall in that little assemblage, as the gentleman gazed with awe and surprise at the outspread sheets.

The rippling waters of the Schuylkill, hurrying along outside, and splashing against the little wharf of the barge-house, sounded low and musically clear within.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the coroner, in a low, hushed, half-terrified breath. "The mystery is solved at last! and chance or Providence has brought a terrible murder to light; and that same mysterious Providence has unveiled the murderer. Mr. Craig, I hold here two papers, one directed to you, the other in which you are interested."

Dr. Ashe, collected as he was, stern as he was, trembled with excitement, and strode up by the coroner. And Alice Ray had arisen to her feet, and with her hand on the shoulder of the roughly-clad man whom she loved, leaned over and looked on.

"Here is the paper for you, Mr. Craig, or Floyd, as you should properly be called."

"Merciful heavens! what is this?" exclaimed Clinton Craig, as he clutched in his nervous hand the open sheet.

One glance at the superscription, and with a wild cry the young man staggered backward. He would have fallen but for the strong arm of Fred Ashe, who grasped him. The paper fluttered from his grasp; but the young physician caught it with his left hand.

And then, amid a terrible silence, he read the following lines:

"TO MY WELL-BELOVED SON, CLINTON CRAIG FLOYD. To be read when I am no more. T. F."

Then the doctor carefully folded the sheet, so closely-written over, and pushed it into the pocket of his friend.

"Arouse yourself! for the dead has spoken!" whispered the doctor, in his friend's ear.

Slowly Clinton Craig—such we shall continue to call him—recovered himself; slowly he straightened up, and crossing his hands upon his chest, stood erect.

Alice Ray clung to him, tearfully, her soft blue eyes lifted half-timidly to his stern face.

"Mr. Craig, I hold in my hands a paper, which, as I said a moment ago, concerns you, almost vitally. Be quiet, gentlemen: I will read the document, which is as valid to-day as when it was written, and which has been so miraculously preserved that its requirements may still be carried out. Listen."

As he spoke, the coroner's voice trembled, despite his efforts. Pausing for a moment and clearing his throat, he read in a clear, distinct voice:

"In the name of God, amen! I Thompson Floyd, being of sound mind and in fair bodily health, make and ordain the following, as my last will and testament.

"Item 1st. To my nephew, Algernon Floyd, son of my well-beloved brother, Kimcoly Floyd, now deceased, I give the sum of one thousand dollars per annum, during his natural life. Should he marry, it is my wish that the sum above mentioned be doubled, the same to descend to his children, should he be blessed with issue, after his death.

"Item 2d. To the Corporation of the Fairmount Park Association, Philadelphia, I give and bequeath the sum of ten thousand dollars, to be used as may seem best to the said corporation.

"Item 3d. The remainder of my estate, both real and personal, I give and bequeath to my dear, well-beloved and natural son, Clinton Craig Floyd, to be possessed and enjoyed by him and his heirs forever.

"Done this tenth day of June, 185—.

"Witnesses,

"ALBERT ASHMEAD,

"RICHARD PETERSON.

(Signed)

THOMPSON FLOYD.

[Seal.]

CHAPTER XXX.

RETRIBUTION.

THAT same autumn night, on which the

solemn inquest was held upon the scarcely recognizable remains of old Thompson Floyd, a small posse of men stood silent and quiet before the splendid Spruce street mansion.

It was nearly eleven o'clock; but the lights still burned dimly in the hall.

After a moment of hesitation and conference, Dr. Ashe—for he was in that group—turned to the officers who were with him and said in a guarded tone.

"He is in! I saw him behind the curtains of the library. I would know even his shadow among a thousand. Surround the house as well as you can; I will enter and confront the villain."

"He is a daring, desperate man, doctor," suggested a tall, brawny policeman. "Perhaps one of us had better accompany you."

"No; thanks. I wish everything to be done quietly. We must be as humane as possible for his wife's sake, who, after all, is a woman. I will go alone; if he resists I am prepared."

He drew on the bell-pull at once. The officers sunk back out of sight in the gloomy shadows.

The summons was not answered.

Again the physician rung.

Only a moment elapsed, when half-timid, hesitating footsteps sounded within the lighted hall. The bolt was turned and the door partly and cautiously opened. In an instant Dr. Ashe placed his shoulder against the panel, and shoving the door wide open, entered the hall.

Minerva, the wife, half *en dishabille*, a small night-lamp in her hand, her face white and scary, her long black hair streaming over her snowy night-dress, crouched like a frightened hare behind the door.

She recoiled, and trembled so violently that the lamp came near falling from her hand.

"You here!" she exclaimed, in a husky, tremulous whisper. "And what would you, Dr. Ashe?"

"I would see your husband, madam; I have business with him," answered the doctor, calmly, though at first he had been startled by the sudden sight of Minerva.

"What would you have of him, Dr. Ashe?" and she clutched him appealingly by the sleeve. "Speak! for Heaven's sake, tell me the truth!"

"Seek your chamber, Mrs. Floyd," returned the physician, in a warmer, more sympathizing tone. "You must, for your own peace of mind, for your own honor, endeavor to forget Algernon Floyd."

"Oh! what is this? Heaven stand by me!" moaned the poor woman, as Dr. Ashe hastily ascended the stairs and rapped boldly on the library door. He waited for no voice bidding him enter, but turned the bolt and entered the room.

Algernon Floyd, half dozing, was sitting by the table, leaning his brow upon his hand. He started to his feet as the rap fell upon his ear, and Dr. Ashe strode into the room. In an instant he was erect—his hand in his bosom.

"Ha! Fred Ashe! you are rather unceremonious!" he ejaculated, threateningly. "What brings you here to-night?"

"The determination to see justice done in Philadelphia," was the reply.

"What do you mean?" and Fred's face grew ashen pale.

"Just what I say, sir."

"Out with it! What do—"

"I mean to arrest you, Algernon Floyd, in the name of an outraged Commonwealth, for the foul, cowardly murder of your own uncle—Thompson Floyd!" hissed the doctor.

"Back! back, man! You are crazy! Stand back! Leave this house, or—"

"Back! No! Do you know these articles—your property—Algernon Floyd?" suddenly interrupted the physician, as he unrolled a small bundle which he had carried beneath his coat. He cast on the table a wet, frayed, faded cord once of red silk, and a rusted dagger of peculiar make.

With a wild cry of horror Algernon Floyd reeled back. But as his face grew almost black with the frenzied expression of desperation, he paused, snatched a pistol from his pocket and fired.

A low, gurgling moan, a half-cry of heart-breaking grief broke on the air, and a heavy fall echoed in the outside passageway.

Dr. Ashe, unharmed and untouched, quickly turned. He gasped for breath as he beheld Minerva Clayton, prostrate on the floor, a purple tide welling from her bosom, the rich red blood staining the snowy night-dress.

In an instant the physician was by the side of the fallen woman.

At that moment the front door was crashed in, and a half-dozen policemen rushed into the mansion.

Algernon Floyd saw his position, saw his doom. Without a moment of hesitation, he turned like lightning, and sprung through the rear window—glass, sash and all giving way.

"After him, men! quick!" shouted Dr. Ashe. "Behind the house! Secure him dead or alive!"

The officers darted out. But the game had escaped; Algernon Floyd was not to be seen, high or low.

Fred Ashe felt the flickering pulse of the wounded woman, and endeavored to stanch the crimson current pouring from the bosom; but his efforts were in vain. The bullet had plowed through the very chambers of the heart; and Minerva Clayton, speaking no word, giving no sign at parting, "slept the sleep that knows no waking."

She was dead.

"'Tis better thus! ay! far better thus!" murmured the physician, a tear, unbidden, dimming his eyes, as he gently, tenderly, composed the stiffening limbs. "There is oblivion in the grave! Beautiful, misguided, erring Minerva! may Heaven shrive thee of thy sins and shortcomings!"

And the brawny armed officers who grouped silently around muttered:

"Amen!"

Algernon Floyd had indeed escaped immediate danger. He glanced not once behind him as he fled on through the almost deserted streets, and lonesome lanes, toward the Schuylkill. He soon reached Fairmount. Skirting the northern border of the reservoir hill, he hurried onward. At last he paused by Girard avenue bridge and peered around the jutting rock at Moll's old house on the bank.

He started, as he noticed a bright light streaming from the windows.

"Ha! Fate itself is against me!" he gasped.

"I must seek refuge elsewhere. God pity me! for I am to be pitied!"

Waiting no longer, he turned up the steep embankment leading to the abutment of the bridge. At last, almost exhausted, he reached the top and stood upon the bridge.

He noticed not a dark, herculean figure which had followed closely behind him, all the way from the reservoir.

Floyd hesitated not a moment, but passing through the gate, hurried along the bridge toward the western shore. He had not taken a dozen steps before, suddenly, the dark figure still hanging behind him, darted upon him.

A fierce struggle ensued; but Algernon Floyd was already exhausted; he was now no match for his gigantic antagonist. Slowly he was borne back over the rail, which guarded the sides of the bridge. His foe's hand was grasping his throat; his lungs were almost bursting with struggling air.

"Aha! now I've got you, Mars Capen Algy!" growled the assailer. "We's met at las' and I golly! 'tis fer de las' time! Yal yal don't twist, for I've got you! You is a-chokin', is you? Yal yal dat's right! Dat's fer poor, Becky, de poor gal, dat you killed for nothing, you white-livered piece o' trash! Take dat! an' dat!" he continued, furiously, drawing a heavy knife, and driving it with a frenzied force into the exposed breast of the unresisting, fainting, dying man! "Take dat! an' when you gits to de bad place, 'member dat Black Ben settled scores wid you at last! Dar!—dat will do! Now, overboard!"

Catching the dead, limp form of the murdered man, he lifted it, as though it were a feather, and flung it far over the railing of the tall bridge.

A moment and a sickening splash was heard; and the scarred, mutilated body of Algernon Floyd sunk beneath the dark, chilly waters of the Schuylkill, not ten yards from the spot where the remains of his murdered uncle—murdered by his daring hand!—had rested and been food for fishes for more than two years.

A form crept stealthily, yet hurriedly, along the river-bank. It now lacked only a few minutes of twelve o'clock. The night was intensely dark, and even the paling stars were obscured behind the thin, gray racks of fleecy cloud floating across the inky sky.

Stealthily, swiftly, the man crept on; he neared the edge of the park by the Schuylkill.

"By Jupiter! the times are getting skittish—infernally ticklish," he muttered, "if the flying rumors are true! And, I tell you, Jem Walton, you're in a scrape, and the Captain, too! . . . Found the old man, have they? Wonderful! wonderful! And yet the job, though hastily done, was well done! . . . Will Algy throw me over, now? Look to yourself, Jem Walton, and get away from here! And then, old Moll, bloody old beast that she is! she knows—too much! Ha! a bright thought! Yes! the hour is late! I have a key—and—my knife is keen! yes, Moll! Now we'll see! we'll see! you boasted once—Ha! what is that?" he exclaimed, as he heard a noise, as of a struggle going on upon the bridge, under the deep, gloomy arch of which the man stood. He listened. The noise increased; then came the heavy, sickening whiz of a falling body; another moment and a heavy splash echoed under the sounding arch, and the flying spray fell in the face and on the beard of Jem Walton.

"What is that—ha!"

He stooped down by the water's edge, as the dark outlines of a grotesque figure, half-submerged, floated up at his very feet and stranded on the pebbly shore.

"Great God! the Captain! Algy! dead—dead! dead! . . . Now, Moll, there is nothing left! The time has come!"

Turning at once, he hurried along the river's edge at a half-run. Then he had rounded the out-jutting rock, and in a few moments paused near the little house on the river.

A bright light burned from the window, high in the air, like a spectral eye gleaming out in the night.

"Ha! good! she's there!"

As he spoke, he took a pistol from his bosom and placed it in his right coat pocket. Then he loosed a knife under his belt.

"Bloody Moll is the only living being who can say a word against Jem Walton!" he hissed. "Come, nerve yourself, for—"

The rest of the sentence was lost, as, approaching the dark passageway under the house, he groped along until he felt the heavy door barring his way. In an instant, he had cautiously adjusted the key in the lock, turned the bolt back, and softly pushed open the door, leaving it standing wide ajar. In a moment more, the staircase was creaking beneath his boot. Suddenly the door at the head of the stairs, the one opening into the elegantly furnished reception-room before referred to—opened. A dark form obscured the light falling through that doorway.

"Is that you, Ben?" asked a coarse female voice.

No answer, the creaking boots still ascending.

"I know 'tis you, Ben, and that your work is well done. What—"

She had not time to finish the sentence; for the man suddenly raised his head, bounded on the landing, and, knife in hand, dashed full upon the woman. The latter, though taken unawares, soon recovered herself, and retreated into the room, at the same time drawing from her belt a huge, naked knife.

"Jem Walton! Then you've heard the news! and at last, you're afraid of the rope! Come on, cowardly villain! come on! and I will rid the gallows of its dues."

She had no need to bid the man on; he was terribly in earnest. In another instant the two ferocious combatants had met in a deadly struggle. They were fairly matched in brawn

and desperate courage. The tempered blades glinted fire as they came in contact. The light was extinguished, and a terrible battle was inaugurated. Nothing was heard save the terrible dull thuds of the descending knives. Suddenly, a long, wailing cry came from the man; then a terrible, fierce sputtering, as if his throat was severed, and then another cry.

"You've got it, Jem Walton! You've got it! and now, to the waters!"

At that instant a pistol-shot rung in the air.

With a half-shriek the woman staggered to her feet, threw her arms wildly about her head, and, with a fearful groan, sunk slowly to the floor. * * The night passed; the morning came and the sun shone through the narrow window of that ghastly room. It was now a death chamber.

Stark, terrible in death, lay Jem Walton in his gore, his throat cut from ear to ear; and near him was Bloody Moll, a bullet-hole through the temple.

CHAPTER XXXI.

REWARD.

THE reader can only infer to a certain extent the strange revelations opened up by the sudden death of Algernon Floyd, Jem Walton, and old Moll. Those revelations would fill a volume.

Certain papers were found on Algernon Floyd's person when his cold, stiff corpse was taken from the Schuykill, and, for convenience, carried to the same barge-house wherein the night before had rested the horrible remains of Thompson Floyd. Those papers told a strange and fearful tale.

Documents were found, also, in the house of old Moll, riveting various links of crime and terror with the dark secrets carried about by Algernon Floyd.

We will briefly state that these singular bloody documents are in our hands; and should a demand be made at some future time, we will write out as dark a tale as ever was spread before the public. Until that demand be made the secret history of these river-pirates and murderers must be allowed to rest.

Only a few words more, and we must push aside the scribbled sheets and wipe our pen.

Minerva Clayton's remains were followed to the grave by only a half-dozen mourners; among them were Clinton Craig, Fred Ashe, and blue-eyed, great-hearted Alice Ray. And as the three turned away from the lowly, fresh-beaped mound in Laurel Hill, there went forth from each of their hearts an earnest prayer for the repose of the soul of the ambitious yet unlucky woman. To this day no marble shaft or blazoned brass tells who rests there, so silently in the moaning cemetery. Her history lives only in the memory of those who knew her in the days that are dead and gone, to return no more, forever.

Old Mr. Clayton turned out to be a defaulter for a large amount of the bank's money. He did not long survive his own disgraceful exposure. He put an end to his existence by shooting himself through the head.

Black Ben was heard of once again; it was far away in the distant West; but his ultimate fate it is not our province here to tell.

Clinton Craig, in due time, succeeded to the property left him by Mr. Thompson Floyd, who was in reality the young man's father. And a singular story was left to the auburn-haired son by the old man; the second paper contained in the small square package told that story.

Clinton had read that revelation with tear-dimmed eyes, on a dark and windy night, all alone in the library. And on the next day he had journeyed to New York. In the quiet shadows of Greenwood, under a moaning willow, he had found a plain slab bearing this brief inscription:

"To my wife, Gertrude; aged twenty-six."

Over that humble stone Clinton Craig had strewn memorial flowers, and with his face bowed to the cold slab had murmured:

"MOTHER! MOTHER!"

A few weeks rolled away, and the silvery peal of marriage bells chimed in the air. The gentle, devoted, blue-eyed Alice Ray was, at last, the glad, happy wife of him whom she had always loved—Clinton Craig.

And Dr. Ashe, noble friend, self-sacrificing, suffering friend, stood by and held out the ring of virgin gold, that bound the twain together. But no pang shot through his manly heart; no tear started to his eye. He was happy in that others were rejoicing.

On the banks of the Hudson, sixty miles above New York, stands the elegant mansion of

Clinton Craig, far removed from the scenes of the young man's former troubles and triumphs. And Alice is spared to him yet, while two blue-eyed boys sport on the spreading lawn, and gladden the passing hours of sunshine there.

Fred Ashe, M. D.—still a bachelor—is with the happy household.

There we will leave them.

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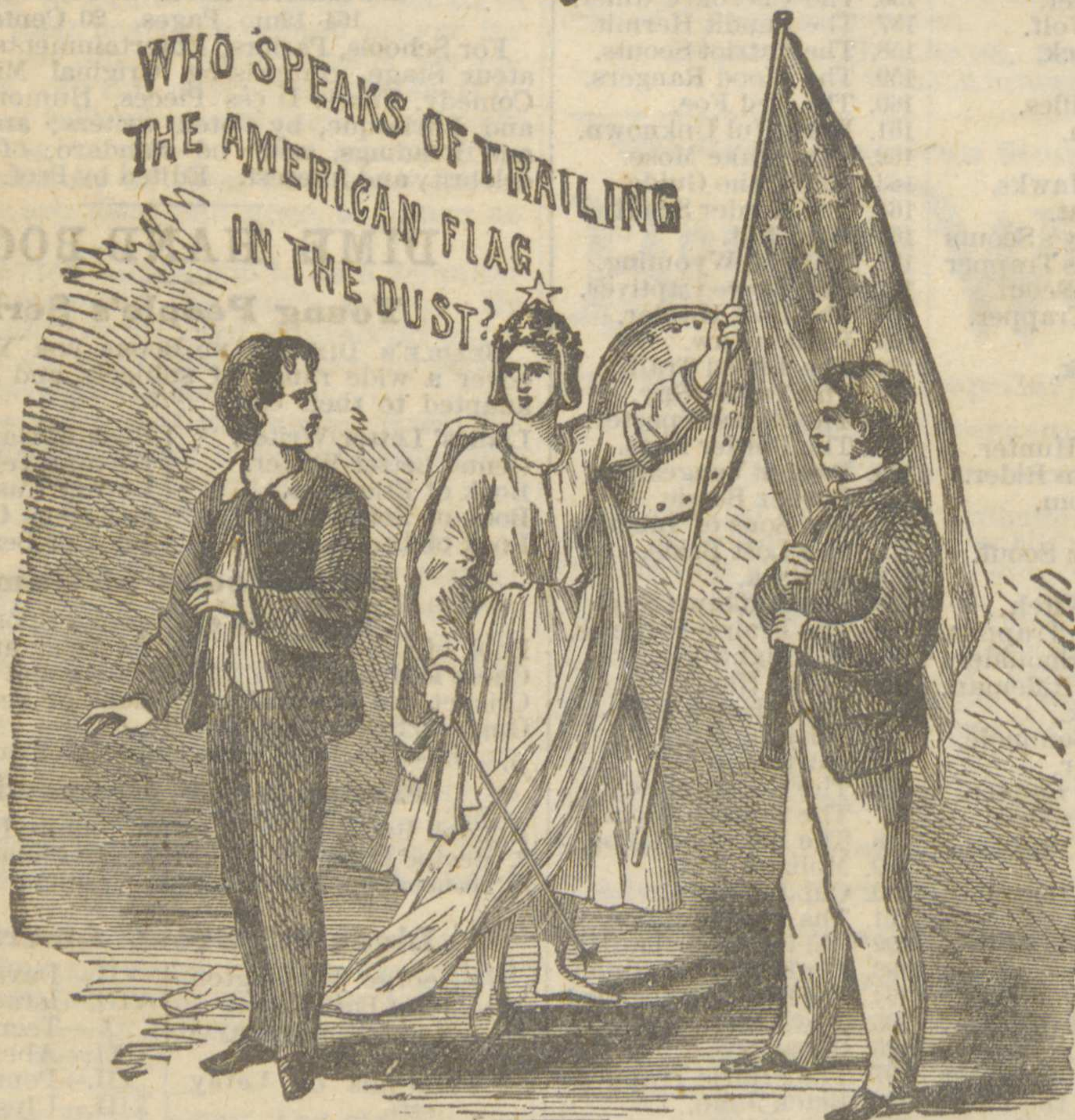
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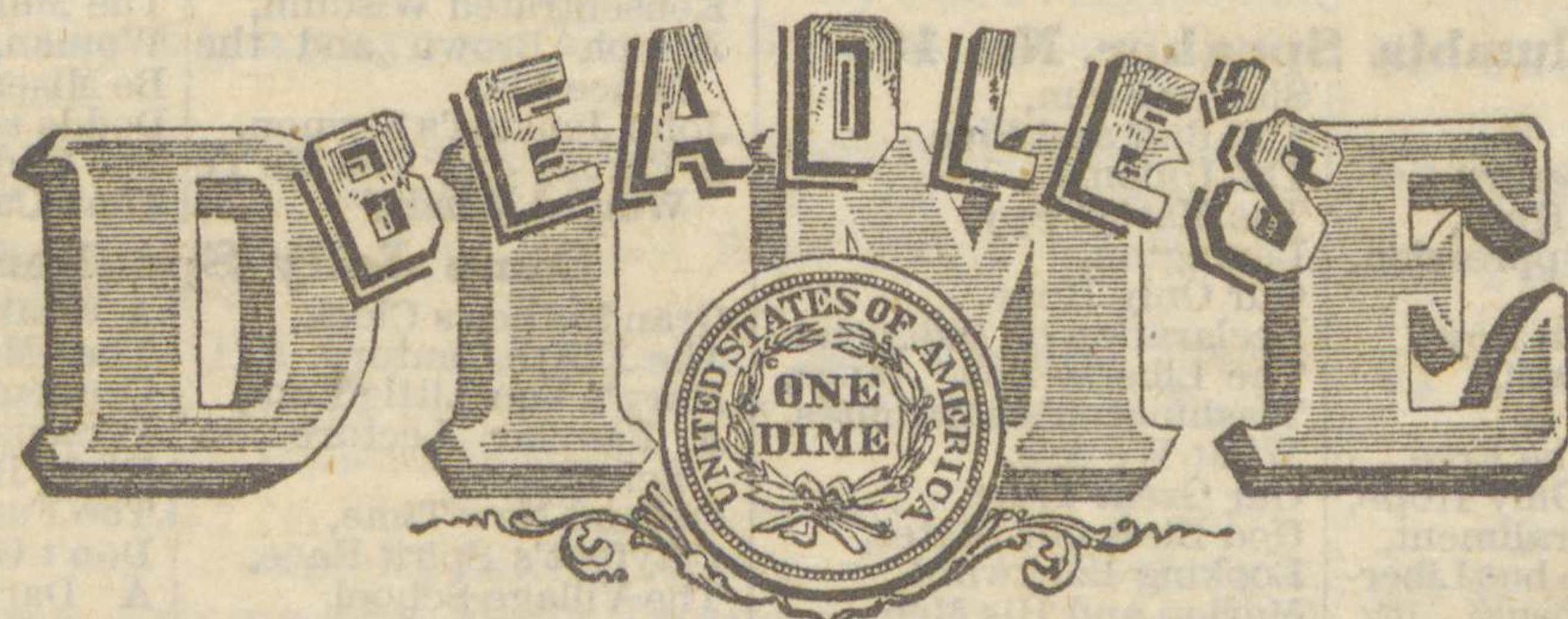
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